

CARRY'S CONFESSION



BY THE AUTHOR OF "MATTIE, A STRAY"

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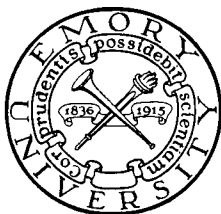
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BOOK I

THE GALBRAITHS.

CARRY'S CONFESSION.

CHAPTER I.

FIVE STREET.

MRS. HIGGS had been marketing in the London Road, Southwark. A brisk woman, who would not have lost time over her business transactions had it not been for less methodical people, who crowded the shops and harassed the shopkeepers on this Saturday night in question.

It was a busy night, London Road way; wages had been paid, and there was money to spend for Sunday dinners, and for Saturday drains at the pewter-covered counter of the "Alfred's Head." Trade was flourishing Southwark way; they were in full work at the iron-foundries, pin-factories, and hop-warehouses about there; nobody was out of work, or out on strike; provisions were plentiful, and not too dear; the working-classes were doing well—too well, some people said, for the spring-van excursion business was a great success that summer, and the publicans had never had such times!

Why, the working classes could have oyster suppers at the corners of the streets, and take Monday to themselves, and pay ready money at their bakers'; and one workman in the neighbourhood had been known to bank money; but then *he* lived at the back of Bethlehem Hospital, and the prospect might have turned his head a little.

Mrs. Higgs lived at the back of the Bethlehem Hospital also—at the bottom of one of those quiet, shady, shabby streets, branching out of St. George's Road—and having done her marketing, after some fight for places, and haggling for prices, was wending her way homewards, with a basket, a brown-paper parcel, an umbrella, and a latch-key.

It had begun to rain—just as Mrs. Higgs had prophesied it would rain to her next-door neighbours, and to the dressmaker with the cough over the way, previous to sallying forth in search

of supplies—and the wind had risen unpleasantly fierce, and was troubling the skirts of the prophetess as she turned the corner of Fife Street.

"I knew what it would be," she said, sharply; "it's always the way, if I leave it till Saturday. And what business have I to leave it till Saturday, now the lodgers have gone? I ought to have known better!"

The wind had Fife Street all to itself until Mrs. Higgs's arrival. Fife Street possessed no thoroughfare, and terminated in a blank high wall, which was more than extra lugubrious that August night; and, to Mrs. Higgs's fancy, seemed to keep the wind in the place on purpose to aggravate her.

Battling her way through adverse elements, with basket on arm, parcel of groceries pressed to her bosom, latch-key on her little finger, and umbrella vibrating and flapping ominously above her, Mrs. Higgs reached her doorstep, shorn of all its whiteness by the "slush"—and Fife Street was more than extra slushy in wet seasons.

It was not till she had lowered her umbrella, and was presenting her latch-key like a pistol at the door, that Mrs. Higgs became aware of an intruder on her doorstep—a dark figure, with its arms crossed, and a hat cocked forwards on its nose.

"Is that you, Joe?"

"Joe!—no."

"Then please get out of this," she said, sharply, after recovering from a little jump of surprise at the presence of strangers. "You can't stop on people's doorsteps, blocking up the way like this. You must go somewhere else. I've nothing to give away—I never have had. I'm sorry for you—but you *must* be off, young man."

A second glance had assured her that the intruder was a young man—the light from the lamp over the way shone upon a white faced, dark-haired youth, who had roused himself at her direct appeal.

"Are you Mrs. Higgs?"

"That's my name, Sir—well-known in these parts; thirteen years come Friday next, the twenty-fust."

"Thirteen years!—so long as that, now?"

"And if you've anything to say to me, whose name *is* Higgs, be quick about it, please. You should know better than to waste your time at your age."

"Right enough, Mrs. Higgs—I should know better—I hope I do," said he, leaving the doorstep for the pavement. "Open the door, please, and let us proceed to business at once."

Mrs. Higgs drew back suspiciously, and put her latch-key in her pocket.

"I haven't lived thirteen years in London, not to know the tricks on it by this time; and one or t'other of you are always

up to something. You don't think I read the newspapers for nothing?"

Mrs. Higgs spoke with extraordinary rapidity; she was a sharp woman, who was not to be imposed upon at her time of life.

"You're afraid of thieves?"

"I don't know that I'm afeard of 'em," was the quick rejoinder; "and certainly not thieves of a whipper-snapper sort, as you may be, for what I know. But if you've anything to say to me about the lodgings, or if you've come from Mr. Webber, why, say it here, please, and don't keep an old woman in the rain."

"But I've a good deal to tell you—and I've come a hundred miles to tell it, Mrs. Higgs. My name is Galbraith."

"Gord bless me, child!—you don't mean that!"

The brown paper parcel was slipping downwards, when she made a clutch at it, dropped her umbrella, and shook up a host of things in her capacious basket.

"Gal—Galbraith! Then you're Master Neal?"

"To be sure. *The limb* that was, thirteen years ago."

"And not the limb that is; or you're no credit to my master," she said, plunging with her latch-key at the door; "come in, Master Neal, and let me see how you have altered all these years, and whether you're like your handsome father, who's quite well, I hope? And what brings you here at this time o' the night, at your age, in this drefful London?" she said, opening the door, and passing into the dark cavernous passage. "This way—mind the step—I'll get a light in a minute. Of all the odd contigimies of life, why, this is oddest! I was only thinking of you just now, coming up the street in the wet!"

She had thought of the Galbraiths, father and son, every day for the last thirteen years, for the matter of that; but the coincidence was not the less remarkable to her. Neal Galbraith stepped into the passage, closed the door, and shut himself in with the darkness, standing with his back to the wall waiting for Mrs. Higgs's summons to advance.

The signal came at last, after much "dratting" of refractory matches, and pattering of agile feet about the room: and then the young traveller entered a plain, but neatly-furnished parlour, where a candle was beginning to sputter upon the centre table. The lady of the house advanced towards him, with two hands, cased in cotton gloves, extended. The youth placed his hands within them, and shook them heartily.

"To think that after all these years——," she said.

"After all these years—to think of it," was the somewhat dreamy answer.

"You can't remember me, Master Neal?"

"I catch the likeness somewhere—but I was only six years of age, you know."

"Ah!—to be sure—no more. How you've grown!—I shall see you better by-and-by, when the light burns up. You've rather dazed me by flopping in like this!"

"Make quite sure of me, Mrs. Higgs," he said, laughing; "I may be a pickpocket, or a burglar, after all."

"Oh! I know the ring of the voice; and there's likeness enough in you to keep the worrits down. Now, let us have the news—take a chair please—not that one in the corner, Master Neal—the last lodger broke that, flinging it at his wife, the ruffian! I'll be ready for you before you're settled down quite."

Mrs. Higgs tossed off bonnet and shawl, folded the latter with a quick roll of her hands, and placed the former with it on a chair, set down basket and parcel, skipped into the passage with her umbrella—after becoming cognizant of "drips"—skipped back again, and dropped into a chair before her visitor.

Face to face thus—two figures, whose parts are not minor ones in this story—let us sketch them hastily.

Mrs. Higgs, a woman of sixty years, and remarkably agile for them; quick in her movements; spare and short of figure; having no superfluous flesh wherewith to encumber her—a thread-paper kind of woman, harassed, as we have seen, in windy seasons of the year. A woman with a lined, even a grave, face—the face of one who had seen trouble, and surmounted it by hard fighting and patience. For they were clear grey eyes, that looked unflinchingly at things ahead still—and thin lips, that were compressed together when silent, and were indicative of a will of their own, should occasion necessitate it. A face that had brightened very much during the last ten minutes, and was looking its best that night.

And the visitor who had come a hundred miles to see her? A youth of nineteen years of age, tall for his age, loose-limbed and angular after the fashion of his years, black haired, black eyed, and sallow faced. It was a face worth looking at, for all that—stamped with an intent, eager expression, seldom seen in so young a man—the face of one who had begun the world early perhaps, and was already armed *cap-à-pie* to battle with it. He wore his hair somewhat long, and brushed back off his forehead and behind his ears, in an eccentric fashion, that seemed to disavow all facial disguise, and leave room for the play of features far from immobile. Altogether a strange-looking, and not bad-looking youth; verging on "interesting," let us hope, or we may as well shut our desk and give up the subject, for the hero of this story—poor fellow! poor hero!—has already stepped from the side-scenes to the footlights.

"And so you're Master Neal turned up again?" said the woman, after facing him for some time in silence, with her hands upon her knees and her head bent forwards; "it brings the old times back, the sight of you."

"I wish it did!"

Yes, Mrs. Higgs was a sharp woman in her way, for the change in Neal's voice suggested a suspicion, and his change of countenance confirmed it.

"Not in trouble—*him*?"

"No, I don't say that—you mustn't say that," said the youth quickly, "when you see him presently."

"Is he in London, then?"

"Yes—at an hotel, awaiting my return."

"And then—go on, child—you're very slow of your age. I'd be shamed, if I was you, of getting on so slowly."

Master Neal smiled at the reproof.

"I had forgotten what a good bustling soul you were, Mrs. Higgs," he said apologetically; "but then it is thirteen years ago, you say?"

"Thirteen year come Friday week the twenty-fust, since I got married like a fool," said the precise woman; "them Fridays are unlucky days, I'm 'clined to think sometimes."

Mrs. Higgs had a peculiar habit of chipping off the first syllables of long words, and launching the latter headless into argument; at six years of age Master Neal had incurred her grave displeasure by mimicking this weakness—he seemed better mannered now.

"You don't like long stories, Mrs. Higgs, and I'm fond of cutting them short myself, though you mayn't think so, at present. Well, we've come to grief."

Mrs. Higgs clasped her hands silently together, and stared more intently at our hero. She understood his *argót* perfectly; there are some slangy phrases that tell their stories accurately at least, and save a string of fine words. They go straight to the "white" like an arrow.

"Come to grief!—ah!"

"It was our bad luck, you see——" said this youth lightly, perhaps a trifle too lightly to be genuine, "and down we dropped like a stone, and here we are!"

"And nobody to tell *me* of it. It's funny!"

"Ah! it *is* funny. I've been laughing all the way to town about it, Mrs. Higgs."

"And that's impudence—and you can keep *that* to yourself. We get lots of that in Fife Street."

The youth reddened at this second reproof, looked grave, and then went on again.

"You must not be too hard upon me yet—presently, I shall get used to you—he always was. I can't expect you to be affected much by our reverses—you've had troubles of your own, I've heard."

"Who told you?"

"My father."

"My troubles didn't concern him, any more than yours concern me, Master Neal—and yet he liked to hear them. Go on with yours."

"Oh! I am not going to say much about them, Mrs. Higgs," he answered quickly; "I've come for advice; we don't know anything about London, and we want cheap—very cheap apartments."

"We'll talk about 'em presently. How did you come to grief—you and him?"

"Easily enough. He was never a rich man—just able to jog on comfortably in a country town—nothing more."

"A 'tented man—what ailed him sudden-like?"

"One of his ideas. You know how clever he was?"

"Good lor! the mess he made about the house with his 'ventions—yes!"

"Ah! but he wasn't a fool, or a man with the ghost of ideas, Mrs. Higgs. You know that?"

"I don't know anything about his ideas—I've seen wheels going round, and smelt a sight of nasty oil, in his workshop—that's all."

"He discovered many things—patented them—hoped to make a fortune from them. He was very clever, Mrs. Higgs!"

"What do you keep saying *was* for?"

"I'll tell you in a minute. He hoped to make a fortune from one discovery in particular, and he didn't, that's all!"

"Why not?"

"Because Tressider stole his patent—went to law with him for rights he never possessed—tired him out by law—made the victories which my father gained by law but another step towards his ruin—pushed on from court to court, with appeal after appeal—a millionaire, conspiring to defraud my father of his independence—and he broke him, Madam, by force of money, and brought an honest man to ruin—the thundering thief!"

Neal Galbraith had warmed during this hurried recital, and forgotten the capacity of his listener; he spoke in a loud voice, with his chest heaving, his eyes flashing, and his hands clenched tightly. At last he opened one hand, and brought it down flatwise on the table, to give due effect to his withering peroration.

"Ah! yes—you're a limb still!" Mrs. Higgs commented, after another jump of alarm. "I see, you come to grief, as you say; how will you get out of it?"

"It's all over, that attempt. I am about to take office in London—turn clerk—anything. I'm going to take care of the old dad!"

"You!—a boy?"

"A man, Mrs. Higgs! Bless your soul, I have been a man these two years!"

"Oh! have you?" was the doubtful query.

"I have cheered him up—fought for him—been housekeeper,

maid-of-all-work, son, and *keeper*. You know him well—he was never made for wear and tear, for much trouble.”

“Perhaps not—who is?”

“And I have found—no matter how—a place in London. Eighty pounds a year to begin with—is not that a *man's* wages?”

“Seems good pay,” was the quiet observation here. “How long they’ll think you’re worth your money’s doubtful.”

“I think I shall be worth it,” was the proud reply. “Why, I’ll work hard. I’m not a fool—I’m strong—I see my way!”

“Nothing like a good ’pinion of yourself. I’ve got one too, and it never did me any harm. It keeps me strong yet. Nothing like making the best of it, whatever it is, and turning good out of it, if you can. But *you* can’t!”

“Why not?”

“You’re fretful, rather—fidgety, and all of a work, like a pail of *east*! Bless your heart, boy, I know every turn of you.”

“No, you don’t.”

“I don’t say that you’re a bad sort—the Galbraiths I knew never was, father, mother, or son. And the mother—*now*!”

“Ah! it don’t seem for the best that she should have died so early,” was the mournful comment here.

“There!—what did I tell you just now?”

“I don’t repine—I’m not complaining,” was the quick answer.

“She died—for the best. A lady born—my mistress, who took part of my heart with her into her grave!” she said, with the first true utterance of feeling escaping her, “would have been one more to work for in these hard early days of yours.”

“Would I have cared for that?”

“I’m speaking of the extra wear and tear, that’s all. But him—your father—can’t he help hisself?”

“Not much—not at all,” was the grave response.

“Sorry for it. I think I see it all. Now, what shall we do?”

“Ah! that’s the question!”

“You want ’partments—cheap ones—very cheap?”

“Yes, for a beginning. I hope——”

“Keep to the ’ginning, please—we’ll settle that first. I’ve a parlour and two bed-rooms to let; you’ll be a help to me; I shall be a help to you—mutual ’commodation and no favour!”

“But——”

“I’ve kept that bill in the window till it’s fly-blowed—times are hard with me too, Master Neal.”

“Ah! you want to help us. I was afraid of that when I came here,” cried the youth. “You who have been a faithful servant in the better times, would go out of the way for us now, and put us under obligations.”

“I’m too old to be foolish—I’m glad to get lodgers, whoever they are. I would rather have those I know, than those who mayn’t

pay their rent, or 'pose upon me. So you can bottle up that pride, and bring your father with you."

"You must never speak to him as if he were dependent upon me. You must bear with him, for he's greatly altered, and a bad temper will try him very much."

"I'm a little sharp, at times, when put out, like other people. You needn't give me all these warnings, child."

"Pardon me, but he *is* weak—not like his old self in anything. You will understand that, in good time."

"I'll try," was the dry response.

"And don't talk about his inventions—above all, his losses, mind that, please."

"I'm not likely."

"And now, what's the rent of your apartments? Let me see the rooms, and go to business in a proper manner, Mrs. Higgs."

"Well, we *have* been going on anyhow," she said, taking up the light, and subsiding into the landlady. "This way, please, *Sir!*"

Mrs. Higgs led the way from room to room. A sitting-room on the first floor, and two bed-rooms on the second, scantily furnished, and of small dimensions enough, but clean and wholesome, and devoid of London smells. Master Neal's face seemed to pale more and more at the prospect, but he kept firm, and faced his landlady with an unmoved aspect."

"I suppose all London rooms are about the same, at this rent?"

"A little wus, sometimes—better sometimes, Sir."

"We can't afford more money this year. Ten shillings a week, you say?"

"I can't take a farthing less."

"I'll have them. Shall I give you a deposit?"

"If you please."

Master Neal paid his deposit, and, relieved in mind by the business character of the latter portion of the interview, took his departure, promising to return with his father in an hour. Mrs. Higgs hoped that he would not be later, as he went out of the narrow passage into the dark street.

In rather less than an hour, when the sheets were aired, and Mrs. Higgs had finished bustling about the upper rooms, the rattle of cab-wheels awoke the echoes of Fife Street. Mrs. Higgs was at the door, shading the candle with her hand from the heavy draught it, as the Galbraiths, father and son, came towards her, and the driver began hauling at the boxes on the roof.

The father walked somewhat feebly towards the house, and was assisted by the son. The son erect and firm, and proud of his charge; the father bowed a little by the grief that had come to him, a grey-haired gentleman, below the middle height, who walked slowly, and with difficulty. Mrs. Higgs threw up her hands spasmodically at the sight of him, and nearly shook the candle from its

socket on to the wet pavement ; before the action could be noticed she was the brisk, matter-of-fact landlady of No. 15 once more.

"This way, gentlemen—mind the scraper."

Mr. Galbraith, senior, looked up at her as he advanced, and from the travelling cloak he wore held forth a palsy-stricken hand.

"Old servant—old friend," he muttered in a weak voice, that was almost childlike in its tone, "you'll help us?"

"When you can't help yourselves," was the brisk, cheery answer, "which won't be yet a while, *I* know! Now, mind the step," she said, taking the outstretched hand, and assisting the old gentleman gently forwards—"people not used to it always come head-furst into the passage ; now then, Sir, one, two!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Higgs. It's like old times to hear your voice. Neal," in a low whisper, "I feel better."

"To be sure, Sir."

Up stairs into the front room on the first floor, where Neal unfasted his father's cloak, and placed him in the easy-chair before the table already laid for supper.

"There, father—home at last!"

"Ah! that's well."



CHAPTER II.

MR. GALBRAITH.

NEAL GALBRAITH, hero, was awakened the next morning by a tapping at the panels of his door. He had come a long journey yesternight, had been vexed by the care of luggage, search for Mrs. Higgs, choice of apartments, &c., and was still sleeping, when his landlady ventured to arouse him.

"Who's there?" he cried at last.

"Only me, Master Neal," was the response without ; "I thought you might like to know it's getting on for church-time."

"Oh!—thank you," after a pause.

"You might like to begin London life in a proper manner, I thought ; but if you're tired just for once——"

"No, I'll be up in a minute. Don't talk so loud—you'll wake the old gentleman, and he seldom gets up before twelve o'clock. I say, I forgot about Sunday's dinner, and all that."

"I didn't."

"You're a good friend, Mrs. Higgs ; but I knew that before, or I shouldn't have come to Fife Street in search of you," he answered from within—"what a selfish scamp I am!"

"You're in better spirits than you were last night."

"I always am good-tempered in the morning. This is a queer blind of yours. I'm hanged if I can draw it up, Mrs. Higgs!"

"There's a knot somewhere in the blind cord; when you get over that——"

"All right—so we Galbraiths overcome difficulties. Hollo! what the deuce is this?"

There was a long pause, and Mrs. Higgs on the landing waited very patiently and hazarded no answer.

"Here, I say, Mrs. Higgs!"

"I'm going down stairs now, Sir, to see about your breakfast. I'll talk as long as you like another time."

"Yes, but wait a moment; what place is this at the back here?"

"That's the hospital, Master Neal. It's a fine building, ain't it?"

"Ye-es."

Master Neal made no further reply, but sat cross-legged and scantily apparelled on the cane-bottomed chair, looking out of the window at the prospect.

"Cheerful," he added, *sotto voce*, after a long ruminative stare; "and lucky for the old gentleman that I gave him the best room as his due. I suppose it's Bedlam—it looks like it. By George! what a nice prospect for a low spirited *man*, which I am not, at all events. Nineteen—going on for twenty, and in low spirits!—pooh, it's not natural!"

Neal dressed, and descended to his sitting-room on the first floor, where breakfast awaited him. On Mrs. Higgs's first entrance, he said:

"I'm afraid we shall give you a great deal of trouble, Mrs. Higgs."

"I'm used to it!"

"My father always has his breakfast taken up to him; and although I can manage it on Sunday mornings, yet——"

"It's gone up, Master Neal. I haven't forgotten his ways."

"But these are new ways?"

"I fall into them."

"I'm glad I've come here, though it is a dull street with a mad-house at the back," said Neal; "I scarcely remember you myself, still I've heard so much of you from him."

"Pity he hadn't anything better to talk about!" was the sharp response.

"And when mother died, and before the other trouble, he missed you more than ever."

"I know that."

"He wrote to you to come to him?"

"I couldn't. I'd a home to mind, and a husband to see after THEN."

"Yes, I remember."

"Now, put on your hat, and go to church. Young men who don't go to church of a Sunday always turn out wrong."

"Oh! then—I'll go," he said; "look after my father when he first comes down—he'll soon settle here, and want no looking after. He's strong in his way—you'll see that, Mrs. Higgs."

Neal Galbraith went to church, and Mrs. Higgs stood at the door and watched him down the street.

"I declare he *is* nearly a man," she muttered; "and to think he was a 'racious baby a'most when I saw him last! And to think that his father has been fool enough to lose all his money, and come down to Fife Street!"

The man who had been fool enough to lose all his money, entered an appearance at half-past twelve o'clock, in the sitting-room of the Galbraiths. He came shuffling down stairs, with one hand on the banisters, and entered the room with a weak, vacillating step, like one to whom the ground was strange yet. A little thin-faced man, with keen grey eyes and a disproportionate forehead, a man that was all forehead, which troubled you with its demonstrativeness, and made your head ache to look at. A man old-fashioned in attire, with gilt buttons to his dress-coat, and a voluminous frill to his shirt, clean for the occasion, as befitted the day—or as befitted the new life, which deserved clean linen as a start off.

He bowed to the landlady, who had heard him descending, and was in the sitting-room before him.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Higgs."

"Good-morning, Sir."

"Where's—where's Neal?"

"Gone to church, Sir, like a good youth."

"Like a good young man!" corrected the father, drawing a round snuff-box from his pocket, and opening it; "a young man who will prosper in life, and be a credit to me. He has told you—all, I suppose?"

"Oh! every word, Sir. There's no occasion to repeat it."

"If it weren't for him, I shouldn't care this pinch of snuff, Mrs. Higgs," he said; "but I did hope to see him start in life a gentleman. I gave him a gentleman's education, and I did my best."

"Nobody 'putes that. And he'll be a comfort to you—I see it in his face."

"I thank you for that opinion, because it's a good and true one; and you were always quick to see the best or worst of us. You see the best of him."

"He has his tempers—hot ones, I suppose. I always fancied that he'd never grow up into a man, but bust suddenly into 'turity."

"He has no tempers, except good ones."

"He don't show them to you, at any rate, and that's like a good son."

"He ought to have ridden in his carriage, Mrs. Higgs, but right was wrong, or wrong got the best of right, and every time I proved my honesty I added to my expenses, and then—the smash came!"

"Yes—yes, I've heard all that."

"Tressider did it," said Mr. Galbraith, beginning to shake with agitation, as she had seen him last night when he tottered feebly to his new estate, "he wouldn't let the matter rest—he had made thousands of pounds out of the patent, and he wanted to make more, and to prove his claim to it; and so he lied and robbed, robbed and lied, and set others on to do the same, until I lost my money—then my wits!"

"But the wits came back, and perhaps the money will."

"They let me go at last, and Neal took care of me, till I got strong and well again. Why, I'm not an old man now—and it will all come round again, Mrs. Higgs, and I shall be a comfort to that boy, instead of a clog round his neck for life. Don't—don't you think that I shall get as strong as ever?"

"To be sure you will."

"But all the money's gone except fifty pounds a-year."

"Then *that* can't trouble you much."

"And some day, when I get very strong in the head, I shall think of something else, and—oh! no, no, no, I'll invent nothing more. Invention brought me down to this; I mustn't think of anything again."

"I'd think of taking a little walk before dinner."

"I never go without Neal."

"Would you like to read?"

"I never read—it makes my head ache."

"Then I wouldn't sit here all of a heap. Why don't you stand at the door and watch for your son's coming from church?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Higgs—I think I will."

"You can see all up the street."

"Well, really, that's very kind of you to say so."

The old gentleman found his way down stairs a few minutes afterwards, and took up his position at the place assigned him. Five Street way, people were partial to standing at their doors in summer-time, more especially the non-church goers, who had leisure. Sunday evening was quite lively in consequence, and Sunday morning was not to be complained of. The workman at the engineer's, who never went to church, and rented a pair of parlours lower down, sat on the doorstep that day in his Sunday's best, and kept watch over a sturdy little boy who toddled up and down the pavement with a go-cart; the milliners over the way, who slept late on Sundays, came to the door about a quarter to one, dressed like countesses, and took stock of the passing world; and a few slouching youths, with yellow sticks with hooks to them, knocked about a ball until Mrs. Higgs tapped

at the window and told them through the glass that they ought to be ashamed of themselves—an assurance that narrowed their sphere of action for the next five minutes.

Church over, and the potman yelping from door to door; the few devout folk Fife Street way—it was a very undevout street—returning home, and glancing *en route* at the new lodger whom Mrs. Higgs had found; the idle boys sent off to the baker's for the Sunday joints, and coming back with careful steps and smoking dishes; Neal Galbraith, with his head very erect, and with a martial kind of tramp, quite out of place in Southwark, at last advancing.

Mr. Galbraith brightened up at the advent of his son.

"Keeping a look out?" said Neal, as he approached; "that's well. Come for a little walk, Sir, if you feel inclined. You know more about London than I, and can show me the nearest way to the City. To-morrow, you remember, I am City bound."

"Eh?"

"You remember; City bound."

"To be sure. My memory's very good," he said brightening up; "I think I will put you in the way, Neal."

The old gentleman was assisted down the step by the son, who drew the father's arm through his and walked away with him. Mr. Galbraith was very feeble, and his strength soon failed him; but his son ignored the fact, with a cleverness and tact beyond his years. Father and son, whose positions were reversed in life, might have appeared true father and son, master and pupil, to an observer at that time; for Neal was thoughtful, and worked upon a theory of his own.

They stood at the end of the street in the St. George's Road, arm-in-arm, looking first towards Westminster, and then in the direction of the "Elephant and Castle." In the full glare of the daylight, the bewildered expression of this old man was pitiable to witness.

"I—I don't think I remember anything about—this place."

"Ah! you were an east-ender, a thorough east-ender in your younger days—of course, you can't know much about Southwark," said Neal; "put you in the City, and I'll warrant you find your way blindfolded."

"I'll warrant that too, Neal," with a chuckle of self-satisfaction.

"What a beautiful day,—why, there's as fine an air here, father, as in old Sussex. We shan't miss the cottage much—you will not, at least, for you're a man of the world, and a philosopher; and I, taking pattern from the father, will settle down—oh! in less than no time."

"That's right, Neal. You must keep strong, my lad. Old people can bear trouble with more patience—it's natural—but you young restless men cannot, always."

"Ah! but there's some one to look after *me*. When you see me drooping, or getting low-like, you will shake the horrors out of me

with a strong hand. I have only you to lean upon—hold up, Sir—steady!”

“I didn’t see that drop in the road,” said the old gentleman, apologetically; “they manage the pavements very badly, Southwark way. I often think that the whole principle of paving streets is wrong, Neal—why shouldn’t there be——”

“Ah! why shouldn’t there be,” said Neal, hastily; “if every parish had its—its sense about it—eh, Sir? But it hasn’t; and it’s no business of ours. I wouldn’t trouble my brains about any plan, to benefit so thick-headed a community as parish folk. I——”

“I know where we are!” cried the father, suddenly, and with the delight of a child at the discovery; “I’ve got it all very clearly now.”

“That’s well.”

And the son looked as delighted as his father at this evidence of “locality.”

“Why, this is St. George’s Road, Surrey end, Neal,” said the old gentleman, with great volubility; “and that’s the Cathedral, where there was a fuss about a steeple they were going to have, and didn’t; and this is Bethlehem Hospital, where they would have shut your father up, if you hadn’t held fast to him.”

“Well—and which is my way to the City?”

He turned his father’s back upon the hospital; but the old gentleman looked over his shoulder at it, with a scared expression.

“And perhaps I might have got better in it—more quickly, Neal. It’s a nice-looking place enough—I’m not afraid of it!”

“Afraid!—I should think not; now you’re as strong as ever, almost. Well, would you go down *there* as a short cut?”

“God bless me, boy—no! That’s Joiner Street, and only leads into the Westminster Bridge Road again. Look here—you have come wrong. Your nearest way from *home* would be the other way, down London Road, and the Borough—or, stay a moment, there’s a cut off opposite, to the Blind School—I remember now; only I wouldn’t take it in winter time, because they are a rough Irish lot about there, and quarrelsome, when the money’s scarce. He! he!” with a wild little croak, “who isn’t?”

“Not quarrelsome—you and I, at least. We don’t fight much!”

“God bless you, boy!—you!”

“Not but what I hope you’ll thrash me confoundedly, every time I talk like a gentleman, or look like a fellow who wants to kick over the traces!”

“If you only had your old pony to ride to office upon!”

“I’m past ponies—I should snap them in half. And as for that skittish little beast I had once, why, it would have shied at the first omnibus, and pitched me into the river, perhaps!”

“God bless me, yes! It’s a very good job we have parted with it, Neal.”

"Ah! it just is!"

Conversing thus, turning, by an artful twist of the conversation, regrets into expressions of satisfaction, Neal Galbraith led his father back to Fife Street. They returned home in good spirits, and the father fancied that the world was brightening round him once again. Neal was young and strong; he had begun life in earnest, but his charge was no clog upon him, for he had ever honoured his father. This father, so weak now, had been a good man, a man of genius, a man to respect as well as love; and Neal had been of an affectionate disposition, and a favourite. He had been spoiled a little; he had his weaknesses—he might have been less proud at times, and could have dispensed with a fair degree of irritability; he was not exactly the real Neal Galbraith then—only an impostor; but his heart was in the right place.

Where it was, and what it was like, and how it stood "wear and tear," we shall see for ourselves in due course, for Neal Galbraith was born unto trouble.



CHAPTER III.

CARRY.

Mrs. Higgs went to church every Sunday. Morning and evening when free from lodgers; with her house full, and lodgers to attend to, afternoon preferred. She went out that afternoon in a scanty drab silk, that displayed a pair of stout double soled boots, and a bonnet of quaker "leanings," fitting tightly to her head. In this guise, she took a leap off the step to the pavement, and went off to her devotions at a canter.

"You'll not be worried by visitors," she said to Neal and his father, at the drawing-room door, before departure; "the milkman don't come afore five; and there's no one likely to call to see me, though I ain't a lone woman. I've some 'pectable 'lations near the London Road, and well they know it, surely!" she added, with a slight tinge of acerbity hovering about her peroration.

"Well, if the respectables come, I'll show them in, at all events, Mrs. Higgs."

"No; let them knock, for coming at unseasonable times," said Mrs. Higgs; "and serve them right! It isn't for a Galbraith to be a-opening my door."

"Why, didn't you know that mine was a footman's place in the City, Mrs. Higgs?"

"I don't like frivolity on a Sabbath," she snapped; "but as much fun as you please of a week-day, Master Neal."

"Oh!"

Mrs. Higgs departed, after reprimanding her junior lodger; and the senior lodger went to sleep in the arm-chair near the window. Mr. Galbraith, senior, got through a deal of sleep in a day; he was always drowsy after his early dinner; and as he woke up clearer and better, Neal tolerated his father's somnolency.

"It will do him no harm," the doctor had assured the son; and so the old gentleman slept to his heart's content.

Neal wandered about the room on tiptoe for a while, then looked out of window, then sat down at the table, with his elbow thereon, and his hand supporting his head; and went in for "a good think" at his prospects. After all, not so bad as might have been; something to be thankful for, after all these storms, that had stranded them on the rocks of a new world. They had not sunk in deep water—all hands had not been lost. There had floated to shore some waifs and strays of the cargo, and he had set to work with a will, directly the shock had been recovered from.

It had happened—the crisis—when he was sixteen years old. It had been going on for five or six years before; but he had been at boarding-school, and the truth had been kept from him; and at sixteen he was scarcely old enough to go thoroughly into the subject. Then his father's illness had made a man of him suddenly; and for nearly two years he became his father's guardian, and aged wondrously. He grew very stern and thoughtful for his years when his father's absence took away the necessity for acting; he had mastered the whole story of his father's ruin then; and he could see in it nothing but legal quibbling, injustice and tyranny.

As his father went off to sleep that Sunday afternoon, so the real Neal Galbraith rose slowly to the surface—a grave-looking, heavy-browed young man, with a resolute face, that was startling in its intensity.

After all, not so bad as might have been! That was his thought, but his features did not brighten at it then; it was doubtful, looking at him, if he were really contented or thankful. There he sat, stern, and silent, and hard! his black eyes fixed before him at a future that did not make them sparkle much, and with the hand upon his knees clenched forebodingly. It was a different character to the youth whom we have seen hitherto; we shall know him better presently.

He went off to sleep with that moody expression of countenance—it even deepened more in his slumbers, and gave him quite a bravo-look; for his slumbers took him into the thick of life's battle; and fancy surrounded him with enemies, hacking and hewing at his pride. It was a distorted picture of his future indignities; and he suffered from it, and fought his way out of it, into real life again, with a start, and sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"I can tell them it was for his sake, not for mine, that I asked a

favour!" he muttered. "Why, I would have starved first. They shall see that!"

He leaned back, and composed himself for a second nap, undisturbed by the dream-figures which had affrighted him. He shook himself away from his last thought, however, by a hasty—"No, they mustn't see it; and take a dislike to me; that's not wise;" and then his head was nodding forwards for the second time, when a long and incessant knocking at the street door brought him to consciousness for good.

"By George!—that's row enough for one!"

It was row enough for fifty, for the matter of that. The windows rattled in their fragile sashes, the furniture vibrated, and the house rocked gently to and fro. Mr. Galbraith, senior, flung out arms and legs galvanically, and bounded from his chair to his feet, on which he stood trembling.

"Was that a knock?"

"A little one," said his son, drily.

"I was dreaming of a new boiler principle, safety principle, Neal, that couldn't go wrong; and I was showing it to Tressider—just fancy, Tressider!—when it burst into fifty-thousand pieces, and blew us all to heaven!"

"That was the knock—which brings us down to earth."

"And whilst I was going up—in pieces, too, Neal—every bit of me seemed to say: 'Well, that serves Tressider right, at all events!'"

"Oh! confound Tressider; we've done with *him* for good. Tressider was a scamp of the first water, and there's an end of him! You and I can afford to look down into the abyss where he grovels with his ill-gotten wealth."

"Yes, yes; we were in the right. We——there's the knock again, I think, Neal."

"Well, I rather think that there is. Sit down—it's no one we know, and it's no one Mrs. Higgs cares about, so let him knock on for his impudence."

Neal laughed, and motioned to his father to sit down; Mr. Galbraith dropped into his chair once more.

"I fear that London is a cool place, father," he said; "I am going to teach myself to bear events with extraordinary equanimity, not to be surprised or put out at anything. That's the way to take the ills that flesh is heir to with composure; you and I have been a little too excitable and passionate, and the world got the better of us in consequence. After this, the coolness and glassiness of Wenham Lake in the cold season; the——hang it, if I can stand this row!—I'll just give that fellow a piece of my mind!"

Neal went from the room with huge strides, and leaped the stairs a flight at a time, thereby alighting on the passage mat with celerity. The knocker was in full career still; Neal gave an im-

petuous tug at the lock, and flung back the door, bringing thus suddenly into the passage a well-dressed young lady, who had clung tenaciously to the knocker to save herself from falling.

"Well, I'm sure!"

"I beg your pardon. I—I wasn't aware that it was a young lady who wished to rouse the street—that is, to call here—and nobody at home."

"No one at home?" was the question somewhat archly put.

"That is, nobody of any consequence," Neal stammered; "and I've no doubt it's all a mistake, for only Mrs. Higgs lives here."

"I wish to see her. I am Miss Webber."

"Are you indeed?" said Neal, expressing the greatest surprise, and still far from composed at the young lady's advent; "well—will you leave any message?"

"No, I'll wait for aunt. I want to see her very particularly—I suppose she has only gone to church, Sir?"

"That's all."

"Then I will wait."

And Miss Webber swept past our hero into the parlour, leaving Neal to close the door after her, and proceed up stairs again. Neal did so, perplexed at this sudden feminine raid on the establishment, and somewhat doubtful as to the wisdom of his steps in permitting a stranger to enter Mrs. Higgs's apartments on the mere plea of being Mrs. Higgs's niece. And yet there was nothing to steal in Mrs. Higgs's parlour but a stuffed canary under a glass shade, and that had been unduly stuffed into a dropsical yellow bird, whose identity was doubtful, and whose value was doubtfuller. Besides, the very idea of imagining that young lady to have arrived there with a felonious plot in her head was not to be credited for a moment—only by a young fool like him, with his country head full of thoughts of London thieves. And what a pretty girl she was,—agitated, perhaps, and red about the eyes certainly, as though she had "come to grief" in her turn; he wondered what was the matter, and why Mrs. Higgs did not make haste home and see?

"Have you ever heard Mrs. Higgs speak of a niece?" he asked his father, whom he found wide awake and erect on the edge of his chair.

"Ne—ver."

"Mrs. Higgs has relations—London Road, somewhere; she said so herself before she went to church."

"Did she? Well, then, there is no doubt about it, Neal, for that woman wouldn't tell a falsehood to save her life. She's an extraordinary woman—with such a memory. What's that?"

"Oh! that's the niece again—why, she's crying now."

"Then something's the matter."

"Don't be alarmed—it can't affect us. We can't be bothered by other people's troubles as well as our own. That will not do."

"No, no, Neal—that will never do, lad."

Consoled by the son's assertion, Mr. Galbraith lay back in his chair, and proceeded to compose himself again. Neal sat by the table, and grew uneasy in his mind, for all his assumed coolness of demeanour. When his father had dropped soundly into slumber, he walked to the door and listened, and became more uneasy still.

"I don't like this!—I can't bear to hear a girl crying," said Neal to himself; "I never heard it before, and it curdles my blood abominably. I wonder what she's fretting about, and whether I can find anything to stop it? I—I think I'll tell her that her aunt will not be long now. She'll hurt herself in a minute if she goes on like that. Whew!"

Neal went down stairs again, and knocked softly at the parlour door. Receiving no reply, and disturbed by the passionate sobbing from within, he turned the handle of the door and entered. Miss Webber was sitting at the table, with her arms outspread and her head resting upon them, her bonnet crushed somewhat out of shape by her abandonment to grief, and some fair brown ringlets crushed with them, but looking none the worse for their disorder.

"I beg your pardon," said Neal, "but she'll be back soon."

Miss Webber, aroused to a sense of decorum by the intruder's voice, sat up and stared at Neal. A fair picture of a spoilt beauty at that moment, her eyes red with weeping, her ringlets showering in any fashion about her face, until they were thrust hastily back by two gloved hands; her bonnet off her head, and only saved from falling by its strings, tied in a bow, which had got round to her left ear.

"She!—who's she?"

"Mrs. Higgs—your aunt—you need not cry about her being out."

"I'm not crying—I've not been crying about her. What do you want?" she added sharply—so sharply, that Neal gave a little jump backwards at her vehemence.

"I don't want anything particularly," explained Neal; "I did not like to hear your going on—that's all."

"It's the heat of the weather," said Miss Webber, smoothing her hair rapidly again; "and I have had a dreadful headache—and I don't see that it's any business of yours, Sir, if I were *going on* a little."

"No, but it wasn't a little—and my father, you see, Miss Webber, had just dropped off to sleep."

"Oh! and you were afraid that I should disturb your father!" interrupted Miss Webber; "my aunt's lodger, I presume?"

"Yes—your aunt's lodger."

"I'm very much flattered by your interest in my sorrows," said the young lady, almost verging into acrimony, "and good-afternoon."

"Good-afternoon, Miss Webber."

Our hero bowed himself out; there was a feeling of extinguishment, as he told Mrs. Higgs afterwards, overpowering him, and he had not impressed Miss Webber by his polite attention. He went up stairs to his father, and shut the door of the drawing-room cautiously behind him. If Miss Webber felt inclined to "go at it again," she must indulge her idiosyncrasy, for he should not interfere any more. He even felt inclined to consider that he had been treated with contumely—snubbed by Mrs. Higgs's niece, and looked down upon by that young lady for being Mrs. Higgs's lodger. That was a good joke to a Galbraith—but he must expect rare joking in his new estate!

Meanwhile, Miss Webber, roused from mental prostration, unfastened her bonnet, took off her silk mantle, and then, standing on tiptoe before the glass on the mantelpiece, set herself thoroughly to rights—looking in that position, and at that time, pretty and *petite* enough, and being impressed with that conviction herself, as was evident from her admiring glances. Miss Webber was still engaged in self-inspection, when Mrs. Higgs's latchkey rattled in the front door, and Mrs. Higgs, with characteristic agility, entered an appearance in the front parlour, before her niece could dart away to the table.

"What! are you here, Carry?" exclaimed Mrs. Higgs, "and staring in the looking-glass to 'muse yourself till I come back again—well, I *do* hope you've spent a pleasant arternoon."

"Don't talk like that, please," said Miss Webber, angrily, "I have quite enough of that at home, aunt."

"Enough of what, child?"

"Of that hard, disagreeable talk, which makes me hard and disagreeable myself," said Carry; "father and mother are both happy in that style of conversation—and now, you——"

"Hush, girl!—speak better of your parents than that."

"How do they speak of me?" was the rebellious rejoinder.

"I don't know—I don't care much—p'raps you're not kind and 'siderate enough, and they feel it in their way."

"They're—they're," she repeated after a spasmodic gulp, that stopped her utterance for an instant, "not kind and considerate to me, and you may tell them that I said so, aunt, if you like. They're old and unsympathetic—they don't understand me—they don't make allowances for my youth and their age, but keep me down, and hold me to their ideas of what is right or proper. *It aint proper!*" she cried in scornful mimicry of some one whose maxims she evidently contemned; "nothing's proper but being tied hand and foot and listening to hard words."

"There, that'll do, Carry," was the remark here; "if you want a friend in Aunt Higgs, or think that I can be one to you—which is doubtful—don't go on like that."

"As if Joe wasn't warning enough to them—Joe, who went wrong because—because——"

"Cause he couldn't go right, and it wasn't in his natur, poor boy. Don't talk of that rackety godson of mine, or lay his sins at your father's door. He's best away, and you're best at home to make 'mends for all the trouble that he has brought."

"They bore their trouble well, then," said Carry, still resentfully, "they didn't fret about him. Aunt, they were glad to get rid of him, I think."

"Speak of what you know, gal, and you'll save yourself heaps of lies," was the blunt aphorism of the old lady, taking off her bonnet and shawl meanwhile. "Now, what's the matter? You'll go on about anything 'cept the right thing—just like you!"

"Shall we have tea?" suggested Miss Carry; "I've come on purpose to have tea with you, aunty."

"And to ask a favour of me."

"Just a little one," stealing her arms round Mrs. Higgs's neck, "which will not hurt you much, or put you much out of the way, and may make me—oh! so happy! I'll tell you all at tea."

"Well, we may get tea over before the gentlefolks ring for theirn," said Mrs. Higgs, softening very much.

"Gentlefolk!——"

"My new lodgers—once my old master and my master's son—'duced in the world by law, my dear."

"The Galbraiths, whom you served once?"

"To be sure."

"How very strange! And I have been rude to the son already."

"How's that, now?"

"He heard me crying here, and came down stairs to tell me to make less noise, or something, and I think I snubbed him."

"Very likely," was the dry response; "well, he'll get over that in time."

Mrs. Higgs bustled about the room, set the tea-things, ran for the hot water, came back with her Sunday tea-pot—she had an especial tea-pot for Sundays as well as a bonnet—and was soon at the head of the table, hostess for the occasion, a hard-faced woman, with motherly eyes—eyes that betrayed her, through a mask of equanimity.

"Now, Carry, though Sunday's a bad day for 'plaints, let's have 'em, and let's laugh at 'em."

"Oh! there's nothing to laugh about."

"You're a child of seventeen, with a child's troubles—when you're a woman, Carry, and look back at this, you'll laugh too."

"Seventeen's rather old for a child, Aunt Hannah."

"I've known children at seven-and-twenty—orful ones!"

"We'll say that I'm a child," said Miss Webber, taking up that

side of the argument with alacrity, "children should not be hipped to death and kept at home from every little pleasure. You have heard me speak of Miss Jennings?"

"Yes."

"She and I have just left school; it's her birthday next week—she's eighteen—her father gives her a little party at her Richmond villa—she sends me an invitation, and I mus—mus—mustn't go!"

"And that's all you've got to worry about, then?"

"Isn't it enough, aunt, for a child?"

"For a child fond of showing herself off in her best things—yes."

Miss Webber winced not at this reply; she desired an *aide-de-camp*, and relied upon her aunt's advice. She did not give up the contest yet.

"I haven't answered the note of invitation at present, although they are very firm—awfully firm," she added, with a little shudder, "at home."

"And you are foolish enough to think that I can help you?—turn your father and mother away from what they think is best for you?—move the obelisk in the London Road to t'other side of Blackfriars Bridge?"

"They won't give way before you, but afterwards they may think it over, and alter their minds."

"You know your father's set against company keeping?"

"Yes."

"And your mother?"

"Yes."

"Then what makes you so anxious about this birthday party of Miss Jennings?"

Miss Webber coloured beneath the intent gaze directed towards her, and betrayed, for an instant, some evident confusion.

"It's very dull at home—oh! so dull, dear aunty," she said; "I have not seen any one of my own age since I've left school—I'm not allowed to see anybody, ask anybody, go anywhere! At one time it's the expense, at another it's the impropriety, and I'm miserable."

"You were tired of school, they said—they took you from it."

"I wish that I had been kept at school all my life, now."

"You never were of one mind long together—fond of change, fond of pleasure, fond of yourself!"

"Like a child, aunt!—when I am a woman I will sober down. Till then, you will not be hard with me?"

"Well, no."

"And you will speak one word for me?"

"Well, yes—on one 'dition, child."

"What condition is that?" asked Carry Webber, suspiciously.

"That if I fail, you'll tent yourself with home, and with them who think it good that you should bide in it. I'm not so certain that it's not the best place for you, or that gadding about will make you any happier. I'll do my best, and failing—you do yourn."

"I'll try," was the half-reluctant response, "there—I'll try."

"That's better, Carry—trying makes one strong. Then to-morrow——"

"You'll come back with me to-night, aunt."

"Not of a Sunday night, to get worriting about parties."

"They don't study Sundays——"

"But I do—as well as I am able, with lodgers and—nieces. Leave it till to-morrow night."

"There'll be the horrid business then—and people calling, and all kinds of annoyances."

"I said to-morrow, Carry," and Mrs. Higgs looked too firm and decisive for her niece to attempt any further argument. Carry took her tea with more complacency after that, even became a new and very different Carry—a lively, laughing girl, more bright and glowing for the April shower of that afternoon. She had won her aunt to her wishes, and winning a friend to her side was to give her hope of that little party at Richmond, on which her heart was set. She was in the best of spirits when the lodgers' bell rang; and when the lodgers went away to church after their tea, father and son together, she watched them behind the machine lace window curtain, and criticised them in a laughing fashion.

"What an odd couple!" she said; "what a funny old man, aunt—why he walks on tiptoe! and what a funny young man, too, with his hair growing backwards over his head like a cockatoo!"

"Don't make game of them, Carry," reproved her aunt once more; "*my* friends!"

CHAPTER IV.

MORE OF THE WEBBER FAMILY.

THE Galbraiths, father and son, had departed churchwards about an hour, when the Fetch of Mrs. Higgs made its appearance in Fife Street, and went up the one step of Mrs. Higgs's residence. Having heralded its advent by three solemn dabs on Mrs. Higgs's knocker, it crossed a pair of rusty black gloves on a still rustier black silk dress, and awaited a response.

Mrs. Higgs, opening the door promptly, found her Fetch in position on the door-step.

"Hannah?" said the Fetch, slowly.

"Johannah!" was the quick reply of Mrs. Higgs.

"Caroline is here, I, s'pose?"

"Yes, she is."

"If I didn't think as much!"

The Fetch walked into the parlour, leaving Mrs. Higgs to close the door, and follow her. Caroline Webber looked at her mother, half timidly, half rebelliously.

"I call these pretty goings-on, Miss Webber," said the visitor; "walking in and out of the house when you please, and without any warning, and frightening the lot of us to death. It aint proper in a gal of your age, and I say 'No' to it for one!"

"I wished to see aunt."

"Did I ever debar you seeing your aunt, Miss Webber?" asked the mother, spreading out her rusty gloves, palm-wards, towards her daughter; "has your father or me ever thought ourselves too grand for Hannah, or been anythink but kind and good to her?"

"Never too grand for me!" said the voice of Mrs. Higgs, behind them; "and that's a blessing, anyways!"

She sat down by the side of her sister, who had sunk slowly into a chair by this time; and the difference between the sisters was more apparent then. Mrs. Webber was an outline figure of her sister—a washed-out counterpart. Mrs. Higgs was short and spare, but Mrs. Webber was shorter and sparer; Mrs. Higgs's face was thin and lined, but Mrs. Webber's was pinched and haggard—a face not pleasant to look upon, in its maturity, though it had been pretty enough once, people said. It was a reduced likeness of Mrs. Higgs's face, without that something in the expression which people liked in Mrs. Higgs. A beggar might have solicited alms of the one in fear and trembling, but he would have never asked of the other, had poverty's grip been of iron, and he above pretences.

"I know what you've come here for," said Mrs. Webber to her daughter; "you think that we're to be talked over again by your aunt, like we was once, more's the pity!"

"Why the pity, Johannah?" quickly asked Mrs. Higgs.

"It led to harm—it never did a mite of good; we set him up in business for the fourth time, and he went to the dogs, as nat'rally as ever."

"Ah! poor fellow!"

"He's not worth pitying—a rip!"

"You say that as well as Mr. Webber, then?"

"I always did—why shouldn't I say it, Hannah?"

"His mother—oh! good Lord! if I had been his mother——"

"Which is indecent, talking before a young gal like Caroline," reproved Mrs. Webber; "and had better be stopped. We aint used to such improper gabble in Shepherd Street."

"Has anything put you out to-day, Johannah?" Mrs. Higgs asked quietly.

"I'm never put out, Hannah—I demean myself too well for that."

"Business—though it aint a day to talk of business—going on tidily?"

"More tidilier than ever, thank you," was the firm reply.

"I'm glad to hear it. I was afraid of 'verses by your looks. Nothing *is* wrong, then?"

"Except in this gal of mine—growing wilful and perverse with every day, after all the money we have spent upon her. Don't teach her to be above her station, or too proud for her family, or too fond of pleasure-taking, Mr. Webber said hisself to the guvness; and if she aint been and taught her all three, along with the other finishings!"

"I'm not above my station—I'm not proud—I do not seek pleasure, only comfort," said the daughter.

"That'll do, Carry," said Mrs. Higgs, detecting the defiant tone in her niece's voice; "only comfort, which you'll always find, if you keep patient. Now look here, Johannah, I'm your sister, and can talk to you better nor I can to Mr. Webber, who's rough and snappish when you 'gest a thing to him."

"He never had any feeling for anybody," muttered Mrs. Webber; "and though you needn't backbite my own husband to me, it's gospel truth you've said, for that matter."

"Now look here," said Mrs. Higgs, with her usual rapid utterance; "Carry's seventeen years of age, and odd, and wants a little change—just a little—from Shepherd Street, to keep her from moping and moaning. You and I was gals once, and liked change—no one better than you, Johannah, before you took to Webber—and gals can't feel like old women, and fall into old women's ways, all of a heap. Lor, we shouldn't like to see them, if we could; and as for pleasure, why, if it's going to a little buff-day that's pleasure—the sooner the poor gal's out of the world the better."

"Go it, Hannah! Set her against her own mother—that's like you!"

Mrs. Higgs flinched at the accusation.

"I hope not," she answered, quickly. "I'd like to see her always dutiful and good, a blessing to you both. If you say 'No' to this, why, I hope she'll say 'Very well,' and make the best on it. If you say 'Yes,' I hope you'll find that it wasn't much to say to 'blige me, and that it helped to make the lot on us more 'fortable. And if I haven't forgotten all about its being Sunday, too!"

"Our minds—Webber's and mine—are quite made up about these Jenningses people," said Mrs. Webber, decisively. "It isn't often we agree upon anythink, but on this we're set—the two on us. The Jenningses are a gay, flyaway lot, and it isn't as if they

was any other people one could put up with better. They're a theayter-going people, though I don't object to theayters in reason—they're going to have a theayter next week built a-purpose for them at home, because they can't have enuf of it out. They're people spending all their money, and too fast a lot for my gal to get thick with."

"You did not say anything about a theayter, Carry?" said Mrs. Higgs.

"It's a little piece, I believe, that they think of performing amongst themselves. If I hadn't been so foolish as to speak of it, I might have gone, perhaps."

"Not to those Jenningses; they like to do things fine, and spend money—we like to do things humble, and save money. All the better for you, Miss Webber, when it pleases the Lord to take us out of Shepherd Street."

Mrs. Higgs, a judge of human nature, or of her sister's nature, gave up the effort to soften Mrs. Webber. She saw the futility of further pressing the matter, and turned quickly to the other side of the question, for her niece's sake.

"And all the better, Carry, that you shouldn't mix too much with these gay folks, p'raps; they might turn you 'gainst your home, and fill your head with lots of nonsense. I don't 'ject to change for you—a little on it; but when you go out of your spear to find it, it may do harm. You couldn't have asked 'em back, you see, and what's the good of obligating yourself to——"

"I'm not going!—it's settled. I don't want to talk or think any more of it," said Miss Webber, severely.

"You're not very much 'pointed, Carry," said Mrs. Higgs.

"'Pointed or not, nobody cares," said Miss Webber, somewhat ungratefully taking up the weak portion of her aunt's English.

"Mother, I don't want to stay here any longer—let us go home."

"It's a pity you ever came out," said Mrs. Webber, rising.

"Good-night, Hannah."

"Good-night, Johannah."

"It's a pity," added Mrs. Webber, "that you've interfered, and made things wus, Hannah; but it was a habit of yours when you was young, and you don't seem likely to grow out of it."

"Too old for much change, Johannah. Good-night to you again."

Mother and daughter departed, and Mrs. Higgs stood at the door and watched them down the street.

"The wust of it is," she soliloquised, "one don't know with that Carry whether she's doing right in sticking up for her—she's an uncommon gal, not over-thoughtful—bad in some things, and good in some things, very. Just the gal—God help her!—that may come to harm if the devil gets at her first; and may sober down and make a good wife and mother some day, if the right man turns up.

Which I hope he will, poor gal!—or it will be that Joe's story over again, only ever so much wus, as it must be when a gal runs wild. But she won't—and I'm an old fool to maunder on like this!"

She watched them up the street, into St. George's Road, intently, and yet dreamily. She was thinking of them still, when they were half a mile away from her, and had met Neal Galbraith and his father coming from church arm-in-arm together.

Neal raised his hat to the pretty-faced girl, who blushed at the attention, and smiled and bowed in return. Mrs. Webber, before Neal was out of hearing, gave vent to a sharp "Who's that?"

"That's Aunt Higgs's new lodger, and his father, Mr. Galbraith."

"A counter-jumping sort of young man *he* is," commented Mrs. Webber; "and his name's Galbraith. Why, that's the name of your aunt's old master!"

"The old gentleman was aunt's master—he has lost all his money."

"Serve him right!—he should have known at his age how to have held it tighter. I dare say he was fond of theayters, and soting away his time in a public-house, or fond of company, or something. If ever a man's fond of company, Miss Webber, he makes a mess of it."

"Mr. Galbraith was never fond of company, that we have heard," said Carry, speaking angrily once more.

"We haven't heard anything to the contrary that I am aware on."

Miss Webber did not care to reason with her mother; she had entered her protest against being "talked at," or against Mr. Galbraith being made an example, for her behoof; after that, she relapsed into a silence which her mother made no effort to disturb. At the broad roadway near the "Elephant and Castle," and making for the London Road, Mrs. Webber's attention became too absorbed in the "crossings" to notice a sudden start of her daughter, a sudden recognition of someone or something in the crowd of people flitting to and fro.

Proceeding along the London Road, Mrs. Webber asked once what Carry was looking behind her for, and Carry answered "Nothing," and proceeded on her way more sullenly than ever. Verging towards home, it seemed as though the shadow of it fell upon the daughter, and submerged her, bringing darker and intenser thoughts. The fair face became more stern in its expression, and the white forehead was furrowed by more lines than one. It might have been the thoughts of the home to which she was approaching, or of that something which had encountered her upon her way—the facts are not evident enough yet for us to arrive at fair conclusions.

A turning out of the London Road, a maze of streets that led in

all directions—to the Borough Road, to the Newington Causeway, to streets, and courts, and alleys, all resonant with noise that summer night, and alive with men, women, and children. Into a somewhat broader thoroughfare, cutting this network of streets in two, and standing before a house, having on its right two large dilapidated gates, on which was painted the name of "Webber, Carriage Breaker." No need to indicate the profession of this Webber, for the signs of it were opposite the house, and some distance down the street, and along the entire length of the blank wall which shut in the major portion of Mr. Webber's premises.

The goods that Mr. Webber dealt in had overrun his space, and there were two old carriages chained together by the wheels, in convict fashion, before his very door, waiting their turn for breaking up. They had had their day, and seen the fashions out, tired their owners' fancy, and passed from hand to hand, from stage to stage, like a smile of ruin. Perhaps, with these types of family distress continually before them, the Webbers—*pere et mere*—had become careful of their money, and shy of "company." There were many tales of improvidence, and debt, and bankruptcy, of selling off by order of the creditors, amongst the carriage wrecks in which Mr. Webber dealt.

There had been a front garden to Mr. Webber's house once, but it was a ghastly forecourt now, full of springs, splinter-bars, panels, and wheels, the latter always chained together, as though their present owner stood in fear of their making off some night at a headlong pace, in search of their better days.

Along this forecourt proceeded Mrs. Webber and daughter; at the door, on which was a small brass plate with "Webber, Carriage Breaker," once more notified, Mrs. Webber delivered her three solemn dabs again. After waiting some time and with great patience, the door was opened or slammed back—it was doubtful which—and the back of the gentleman who had responded to the knock was seen receding uncourtously towards the parlour. Mrs. Webber entered, followed by her daughter, who looked wildly down the street, and made a still wilder signal with her hand before she closed the door—a signal that was seen by some one in the rear, and rapidly returned.

After the door was closed, this some one took up his position against a public-house at a little distance, on the opposite side of the way, and seemed to make up his mind to wait. A short, thin man, indifferently attired, with one elbow protruding from a coat three sizes too large for him, and with a cap pulled over his forehead till it met his eyebrows, and the broken peak shadowed his nose. A man with not much face to be seen until he jerked his head back now and then, to take stock of passers-by, preferring that method of observance to raising his cap one inch higher on his head. A thin-faced man, with scrubby whiskers, and still scrubbier moustache,

holding between his lips a short clay pipe, which he smoked vigorously whilst waiting there, his hands in his trousers pockets, and his legs encroaching on the public space. A figure that one sees, not too seldom, at the same place—a fitting figure for a gin-shop portal, evidence of what has been and what is—the man-wreck that the fiery waters have washed ashore, fit for nothing good or profitable.

He was evidently at his ease, with his back to the “Feathers.” He could have waited there comfortably all night, varying proceedings now and then by refilling his pipe, and having dram-glasses brought him. That was life and enjoyment enough for anybody!

But dram-glasses were not brought, and he did not go in search of them, for reasons pecuniary and cogent; so he kept his place sober and profound, clinging to the varnished pillar, a gin parasite. Occasionally people stumbled over his feet, and he begged pardon in a husky voice, and without altering his incline towards the roadway; once a little bonnetless girl tripped over his boots and fell, and he stooped and picked her up with a gentleness that might not have been expected in him, and told her not to cry, but to make haste home, and go to bed like a good girl as she was. Every five or ten minutes he jerked up his head to look more intently at the carriage-breaker’s windows, and then, satisfied with the inspection, to subside again into himself.

A patient vigil, which was not disturbed for hours by anything important. Servant-maids came for supper beer; men and women passed in and out, talking loudly, laughing loudly, swearing loudly, according to their different degrees of drink; the potman started on his round, and came back in due course, and still the watcher smoking on in placid disregard of time and place. Lights were burning in two of the carriage-breaker’s windows, and they were facts to him which kept him stationary. Finally, the potman appearing again, and thrusting up the shutters with his pole; the last man turned out of the gin-shop, and the doors barred and bolted on the thirsty—but still the man with the short pipe biding his time.

The lights extinguished in Mr. Webber’s house, the street becoming more deserted—a church clock striking twelve, when the man moved at last, shook himself in a dog-like fashion, and crossed the road. At the same instant the creaking gates leading into the yard were unfastened from within, and left ajar. The man, used as it were to these manœuvres, passed them, turned back hastily, and stepped through; the gates were locked once more behind him, and he was standing in the night’s darkness—very intense and thick beneath the gateway—peering beyond at the lighter yard, where seemed heaped all the old carriage-material in the world.

“Joe,” said a voice at his side.

“Carry, old girl,” was his answer—“why, it’s blacker than ever underneath this place.”

"Hush!—don't talk so loud—father's always a light sleeper. Where have you been lately?"

"In the country—about the fairs."

"Doing well?"

"About as well as usual, Carry," replied Joe, with a short ironical laugh.

"I have made you up a bundle of things, which you can wear or sell, or do what you like with; money, you know, I haven't much of."

"I suppose not."

"Here's five shillings — I wish they were five pounds, Joe, although they would not do more good than the five shillings."

Joe laughed again.

"Five pounds would go further, at any rate. Where's the bundle, Carry?"

"In the corner behind you."

"I shall be locked up for one of these bundles some day—the police are always suspicious of bundles after dark, and upon my soul it will be hard to explain their possession."

"It must all come out then—there's nothing of which I shall be ashamed. You are my brother, and you were the only one ever kind to me in *there*."

The brother could understand her gesture, although the darkness was too impenetrable to note it.

"Oh! you were a child," he said, groping about for his bundle, "and that made all the difference."

"You—you don't ask me how *I* am—whether I am happy, Joe?" she said.

"You are a woman, and can take things patiently. They mean well, I dare say—you would be a young fool not to put up with them."

"You couldn't."

"Well, I went wrong, Carry, and that was my fault. They might have gone the wrong way to work to cure me—it's as likely as not, and it doesn't matter now!"

"They are not like anybody else's father and mother, Joe. They keep you down, and hold you down, and think that you can't be right in anything."

"Ah! they've notions of their own," said Joe, very indifferently; "but a woman can put up with them—she would be a flat if she didn't. And, talking about women, are there any women's dresses in this bundle?"

"One or two of mine; I thought you might sell them for something."

"That's a good girl. But I shan't sell them, although they'll be rather short for Mrs. Webber."

"*Mrs. Who?*"

"Oh! you didn't know that I was married?"

"How should I know?"

"Of course not. I've been married these six months; she's—she's a giantess."

"A giantess!"

"A little investment of mine—I married on spec, and she's not a bad sort, though it was a bad spec, mind you. But you won't care to hear anything about my affairs, and perhaps the governor will drop upon us here. Good-bye."

"I wish I could marry and get away from here—marry a giant even, to be quit of this dull, dreadful life!"

"Take it easy, Carry," said her brother, swinging his bundle on his shoulder; "I can see now what a fool I was not to take it easy! You're a woman, and can manage them both—I would, if I were you. Always take it easy, girl."

"Wait a moment," said Carry, "you must do me a favour in return—I have always helped you."

"You always were a trump to stick up for a fellow, I will say that."

"You must take this letter to-night—to-night, you understand—to the address on the envelope."

"But——"

"It's Shad Thames way, but I have only you to trust in, Joe, and I can't go myself. There's a letter-box in the gate—drop the letter down—it isn't much to do."

"I'll do it, Carry."

"Here, then—now, good-night."

She gave him the letter, unlocked the gate, and let him out into the street, securing the gates behind him. He went away at a good pace, bundle on shoulder, keeping in the shadow of the houses, and always increasing his rate of progression past a lamp-post. He was afraid of his honestly acquired bundle, and of questions concerning it, for a policeman in the distance scared him, and he went back a few paces, and down a street that he had recently passed. Finally he found his way to a narrow, stifling court, into which he plunged, as into a Slough of Despond, and worked his way to a house at the extremity, wedged against another house that met it at right angles, and terminated that geometrical thoroughfare.

A knock at the door and then heavy feet shambling along the passage and shaking the house as they advanced.

"Is that you, Joe?" was called through the keyhole.

"Why, what have you to be nervous about?" he called back at her; "you're not afraid of being robbed, Sall?"

"Not much," was the answer returned; and then the door opened, and Joe Webber trundled his bundle into the passage.

"See what's to be made of those things, by the time I get back again," he said to the dim figure in the unlighted passage;

"the girl's been good to me again — she's something like a sister!"

"P'raps all will come round in time, and——"

"And don't distress yourself—for that's not likely. Ah! if you only knew my governor!"

"Where are you going?"

"To deliver a message for Carry. One good turn deserves another. Shan't be long."

"Joe—Joe!" his wife called after him in a deep tone.

"Hallo!"

"Don't get drinking to-night, for God's sake, if she has given you any money."

"Why the public-houses are shut, you stupid!"

"So much the better!"

Joe hurried away, and in a few minutes he was out of the court and in Blackman Street, Borough.

Under the first lamp-post—which he did not shrink from now—he stopped to read the address of the letter that had been given him by Carry.

"What's she up to in Shad Thames?" he said, reflectively; "sweethearting, I suppose—to think that that girl has grown old enough for those games!"

He held the letter towards the light, and read the address slowly to himself.

"Walter Tressider, Esq., Honesty Wharf, Shad Thames."

"Well, I'm blest!" was the inelegant comment of Joseph Webber, before starting on his way again.

CHAPTER V.

NEAL GALBRAITH BEGINS BUSINESS.

NEAL GALBRAITH was ready for business the following day—eager for that stir and hum of business-life, which would assure him of his place in the world, and his worth therein. Presently he should be earning his living, he thought proudly, keeping the wolf from the door of the Galbraiths—working upwards, perhaps, as so many had done before him.

It was not for the Galbraiths to be ever at the bottom of the ladder, watching people less clever than they making their way to the top. If he had not his father's ability, thought Neal, he had his father's perseverance and doggedness, and they would take him up.

wards, unless he gave way like his father. He was young, strong and firm—and *that* was not likely!

Mr. Galbraith, senior, surprised his son by appearing at breakfast at eight o'clock.

"Early hours, Sir," said Neal; "why, however will you get through the day without me?"

"I shall manage, my lad," replied the father, rubbing his hands together with supreme satisfaction at his son's astonishment; "I'm not going to lie a-bed any more and put everybody out, and give everybody trouble; I hope to be of use presently—don't you think I'm coming round, Neal?"

"Certainly; only you must not go too fast, remember."

"I shall be very careful, and you, Neal, always careful, too?"

"Trust that," Neal answered confidently.

"I thought I'd come down and give you a bit of advice before you started. Beginning the world this is, Neal!"

"With a stout heart, and hope ahead of me!"

"Yes. Now, Neal, lad, pay a little attention to me, and don't fidget with that spoon. It *is* good advice—upon my word, it is."

Neal laid down his spoon, and looked attentively at the little gentleman opposite, who sat with his heels on the rail of the chair, his withered hands clasped together, his whole form bent forwards eagerly. He had come down in one of his bright moods—moods which even surprised his son occasionally—and it was an intelligent, if worn, face into which Neal gazed. Mr. Galbraith had brushed his scanty grey hairs to the back of his head, after his son's fashion, and appeared to have a bigger forehead than ever in consequence.

"You're going into a new world—treat it with respect, Neal, and don't hope to be respected yourself till you have done something to deserve it."

The old man spoke so clearly and precisely, that Neal's interest deepened. Yes, his father was getting better—since his illness, he had never heard him speak like that before.

"For you see, Neal, strangers will take time to understand you, and find out how clever you are."

"Ha! ha!—how clever! That they will, I'll wager!"

"You have odd ways, and if everybody don't take to them, why don't fall out about *that*. Go on quietly, patiently but firmly, thinking of your employer's interest before your own, in office hours, and how to advance your own honestly and fairly, out of them."

"Yes, Sir."

"You'll try and remember?"

"I call them golden words, Sir," said Neal, in an excited manner; "golden words of promise to me!"

Words of promise for his father's better life, he thought, he

hoped. He went down stairs in the same excited way, and took Mrs. Higgs by the wrist into the parlour.

"Good Lor! boy, how hard you grips!" cried Mrs. Higgs, writhing in his grasp.

"I beg pardon—I wasn't aware that I held you so tightly," he said; "but, Mrs. Higgs—see to *him*!—find something to amuse him, in the house, or in that back garden—I rely upon your help. He's getting better—oh! you should have heard him talk to me, like his dear wise self of the old days, Madam!"

"He'll brighten up, 'pend upon that, Master Neal. You'll 'cuse my calling you Master Neal, sometimes?"

"Always, Mrs. Higgs—it's an old name, that speaks of the old times."

"The old times coming back, Sir."

"Ay! we'll hope so now! Good-morning—if you should find him drifting into talk about machinery, stop him; if he asks for a paper and pencil, tell him—oh! tell him, they don't sell such things in London! Good-morning."

He was on the door step, when he turned again.

"I may as well tell you that that the name of my employer is Hopeful—it may be necessary."

"That's a lucky name, Sir."

"It sounds like it. Good-day."

Neal Galbraith went away to business. Tall for his age, manly for his age, he did not deserve the epithet that Mrs. Higgs had bestowed upon him that morning. He looked, as Mrs. Higgs said to herself again on the door step, "Quite the man!"

"He's quite the man," she repeated, watching him; "and all the better as things have turned out; though I don't like the young ones to get men and women too early. And there's that imperent dress-maker—the youngest—looking after him behind the blind—I know the hussey; and if Miss Beswig hasn't come to the door to see if it rains!—that boy'll be worried by the gals about here, if I don't take care!"

Meanwhile the boy aforesaid went on his way, his face gradually assuming that stern look which beset it when he was "left to himself." Alone in the world, with the world before him, he seemed to become impressed with the seriousness of his position, or the weight of his responsibility, and to grow old with it as it took possession of his mind. Life was an uncertainty with him yet; he must not become too sanguine, and believe too readily in his own advancement, or his father's better health. The present was dark enough—and in the present he must live.

Neal went on at a soldier-like pace up the St. George's Road, and down the Borough, marching with his head flung back, and chest squared, like a man afraid of nothing. Walking rapidly and regularly with the stream of clerks bound City-wards, his resolute

face attracted some little attention; people coming against stream occasionally bestowed upon him that half curious, half-vacant gaze, common to passers-by interested in human nature.

Neal became embarrassed by these London starers, at last, and fancied that he must have a "black" on his nose, till a young lady, with rainbow trimmings, going on milliner's duty in the Causeway, smiled like a sister as she passed—and young ladies never smile at "blacks!"

At Tooley Street, Neal Galbraith paused, made some inquiries of a policeman, and then went on again, turning suddenly to the right, and leaving the bank and merchant clerks to flow on over London Bridge. Keeping to the Southwark side, this youth who had told his father of his berth in the City went through Tooley Street into riverside streets, Shad Thames way; past potatoe salesmen's depôts, six-storied wharves, where casks were flying in mid-air, and carts and waggons were blocking up the thoroughfare; where, through open gates, glimpses were caught of the river, and of innumerable masts of ships: where three-fourths of human kind seemed clad in corduroy jackets, and white, smeary blouses, and only a few out-of-the-way people, like himself, wore broad-cloth. Neal plunged on, looking right and left, and, failing in his search, finally solicited the advice of a porter out of place, who was leaning against a post, and waiting to be taken on as "extra."

"In the metal trade?—don't know sich name, Sir," was the response to Neal's inquiry.

"It's a large firm, I believe."

"I'm fresh in these parts. Here, Jim!"

Jim appeared, to tender information—Jim, at the end of a truck, laden with a woolly produce.

"What name, Sir?"

"Tressider."

"I think there is a little crib higher up of that name; but I never did any business for 'em, and I don't know anybody else who did."

"That can't be the place—they're in a very large way of business. It's a wealthy firm."

"Ah! you've got the wrong name, then."

Neal did not stay to argue with this stubborn man. Got the wrong name, indeed! Why that name was engraven on his heart, as Calais was on Bloody Mary's! Not a wealthy firm—and it had spent thirty thousand pounds in law, he knew. Neal went on, however, and presently gave up again.

"Which is Tressider's—people in the metal trade?" he asked again, somewhat fiercely this time, for it was close on nine o'clock, and he would not have been late the first day for the world.

The person addressed was a shock-headed youth, with trousers tucked up to his knees, and bare legs and feet plastered with river mud. He had been evidently enjoying himself at the water-side.

"Tressider's?—oh! you've passed it."

"Confound it!"

"Seven doors orf—little place—gates in the wall, and a brass plate—give us a ha'penny, guv'ner."

Our hero paid his halfpenny for information, and found the firm of Tressider at last. There were two small gates, ornamented with a brass plate and a letter-box. One gate was ajar, and our hero stepped through into a paved yard, on the left of which was a warehouse, not so small in itself, as it was dwarfed by the buildings towering above it,—and on the right a private dwelling-house, with a lamp over the entrance-door, and the door open. Neal went up the steps, and through a swing glass-door into a melancholy office, where a lanky youth, lost in a high shirt-collar, was practising with dumb-bells. He put the dumb-bells down as Neal advanced, and surveyed him between half-closed eyelids.

"Is Mr. Tressider within?"

"Which one?"

"There are two, then?"

"There's the principal—he's not up yet. There's the principal's nephew—he's not down yet."

"What do you mean?"

The flippant youth backed two steps at this stern inquiry. Neal might intend mischief, and it was as well to be out of harm's way, and harm's reach.

"I can't explain anything further," he said impudently. "Mr. Tressider, junior, will be down here in about half an hour—when Mr. Tressider, senior, gets up, I dare say he'll attend to you, if you've anything to pay."

"Take my card to your master, and tell him that I have come, as requested."

"Won't you wait till Mr. Pike comes?—he knows all about the business—he knows everything; he'll be here in a minute."

"Take that card up stairs at once," said Neal.

The voice and look were sufficient this time, and the youth departed, leaving his dumb-bells on the desk.

Neal looked round at the gloomy office, made noisy only by a viciously ticking clock, and wondered where the business was to come from, or how the business that strayed hitherwards was generally conducted. People must pass the place as he had, and grow tired of searching for it—it must all be in the "connection," he thought, and here were only accounts to keep and ledgers to fill. But there were no ledgers in sight, no books, pens, ink, on the three or four desks before him—nothing about except dust, which was almost an inch thick on everything.

Neal was standing with his back to an office stool and wondering still, when a high-shouldered young man of five or six-and-twenty came slowly up the steps, as though he were counting them, entered

the office, took off his hat and a pair of black crinkly gloves, set them on one side, passed behind a long low counter, to the first desk near the door, mounted his office stool, and then turned upon our hero a pair of fishy grey eyes.

"Can I do anything for you, Sir?" he asked in a weak voice.

"Nothing, thank you, at present. I have sent up my name to Mr. Tressider."

"Oh! indeed."

This was evidently Mr. Pike, thought Neal, the gentleman who knew all about the business. Mr. Pike was a strange specimen of a clerk—and of a head clerk. No bustle about him, quiet and methodical, evidently taking the events of business life with great composure. A man somewhat above the middle height, narrow-chested and high-shouldered—a pale-faced, nubbly-looking man, with high cheek bones, and bristling sandy hair cut short all over his head in tooth-brush pattern. A man with a melancholy face, that one wondered if it ever smiled—a somewhat shabbily-dressed man, who did not study appearances, or care about a fit to his coat in office hours, at least.

Mr. Pike opened his desk, and drew forth his books from an inner receptacle, held an inkstand to the light to make quite sure that there was sufficient liquid therein for the purposes required, dipped a pen into the ink, and then stared hard at Neal again.

"Your name is Galbraith, I think?" he said at last.

"Yes, Sir."

"Have you been waiting long?"

"About five minutes."

"This will be your desk," indicating the third from the door; "I hope that you are clever at correspondence?"

"I can write a letter pretty well."

"And a good hand at figures?"

"Try me."

"I will presently," said Mr. Pike; "there's no occasion for hurry. We're not very busy just now."

"I hope that I'm not one clerk too many, Sir?" suggested Neal, drily.

Mr. Pike turned on him again his unexpressive sole's eyes.

"You'll be of use now, Mr. Walter is—is not particularly regular. We can't get on without two here—Radwick's nothing to speak of, and insults everybody he can. Poor fellow, it's his infirmity!"

He wrote a few lines, then left off again.

"May I ask how old you are?"

"Going on for twenty, Sir."

"I should have thought that you had been older than that," he said dreamily; "you are the son of Galbraith, the inventor?"

Neal started at this pertinent question.

"Yes; did Mr. Tressider tell you that?"

"No, I guessed it. The name's not common, and your father was an inventor, and a very clever one. He is well, I hope?"

"Very well, thank you," replied Neal, who was not a young man to parade his family troubles.

Mr. Pike scratched away for awhile, then left off again.

"Business is rather slack just now," he added, as if by way of apology for his lax attention to it; "nothing much doing in metal. We expect a very large order next month from Russia."

"Oh! indeed!"

"Your father did not break up much, I suppose, when the—the money was gone?"

"Sir!"

"You will excuse me, but it's a singular fact, that some people do."

"Wouldn't you break up, Sir, a little, under similar circumstances?"

"No."

Mr. Pike said this very quietly, but with a singular firmness that interested Neal.

"I don't believe any man can lose his fortune without grieving after it," said Neal.

"Not any man whose soul is linked to the world from which he extracted it—perhaps not. For he seeks his comfort from the world, and it fails him."

Neal stared at the speaker.

"My father lost a fortune, but he did not give way," continued Mr. Pike. "He was a happy man to the end of his days."

"And you?—how did you feel when they said that you were no longer a gentleman, but must earn your own living?"

"Oh! I felt pretty well, thank you. I was young, and strong, and I went to work with a will."

"So will I—when there's any work to do," added Neal, ruefully.

Mr. Pike dashed into business again, muttering,

"We expect to be very busy next month."

Somewhat perplexed, and even oppressed by Mr. Pike, our hero went to the third desk, which his fellow-clerk had indicated, and mounted his office stool to ruminate.

"I'll put you in the way, in a minute," Mr. Pike said; and Neal thought that it was almost time he did, if his employers wished to make anything out of his services. Mr. Pike finished his letter, and sealed it, then left his desk, and came to our hero with a heavily-laden bill-file.

"You can see what all these amount to, in the first place, and then I'll show you our system of book-keeping—it's rather complicated, but it's a perfect check on expenditure, and my own invention."

Neal began adding up the bills that had been given him; and whilst doing so, the messenger, Mr. Radwick of abrupt demeanour, returned to the office, cleared his dumb-bells from the desk, and set to work himself. Neal thought that he might have brought him an invitation to see Mr. Tressider; but the junior clerk made no sign, and Neal would not appear anxious to face his employer.

Business began about ten o'clock—one small boy arrived with a letter, which required an immediate answer from Mr. Tressider, and did not get it; two men drove into the paved yard with a cart, and Radwick went out and spoke to them, found a warehouseman from somewhere, delivered to them a large kitchen range, took their money for it, and gave Mr. Pike's receipt for the same; a gentleman entered with a pattern-book, and talked volubly to Mr. Pike, who shook his head, and said they did not care about any new designs at present, and that they had their own designers down in Birmingham; two gentlemen called to see Mr. Tressider, and promised to call again in an hour; somebody came and paid money to Mr. Pike; another gentleman, with a pen behind his ear, looked in about the gas-rate; finally, a young man, with a flower in his button-hole, and a jewel in the riding-whip that he was slinging backwards and forwards in his hand, came with a bound into the counting-house.

"Is Mr. Walter down yet?"

"I haven't seen him," said Mr. Pike.

"I know his room!—I'll look him up!—oh! here he is!"

"Ah! Jennings, old fellow!—anything wrong?"

"Yes, by Jove! there just is!"

Neal glanced at the last comer, advancing from the door at the end of the office—a tall young man, of one-and-twenty, or thereabouts, with a fresh-coloured, handsome face, and a long silky moustache, that almost touched his shoulders.

He looked at Neal as he passed, and then the two young men went to the door step and talked long and earnestly, the gentleman called Jennings softening by degrees beneath the pleasant demeanour of his friend.

"But he has thrown up his part like a fool," said Jennings; "and we're so pressed for time, and it will put the lot of us out. I said all along that we should make a mess of it."

"Leave it to me—we'll fight through it, old boy, and bring down the house with the applause of assembled multitudes. It's deuced odd if I can't find a substitute—when's the last rehearsal?"

"To-morrow night, of course."

"Trust in Walter Tressider—I'll work it."

The two stood talking together for some time, then shook hands, and parted; Walter Tressider returning to the office, and advancing to our hero.

"Mr. Galbraith, I presume?"

Neal bowed.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Galbraith," he said, shaking hands with our hero. "I trust that we shall not kill you with over-work?"

"I am not afraid of that, Sir."

"Will you step into the first room on the left, and see my uncle? I quite forgot to mention that he wishes to speak to you for a few moments; but I have been so bothered with business lately, that I am afraid my memory is becoming defective. Radwick, call me a cab."

"Yes, Sir."

"Any letters for me?"

"One dropped by hand, Sir, into the letter box—it's on your desk."

"All right. Hansom cab, mind, Radwick. The first room on the left, Mr. Galbraith."



CHAPTER VI.

MR. TRESSIDER.

NEAL GALBRAITH did not leave his desk and make his way to the first room on the left without an acceleration of his heart-beats. He was about to face the man to whom might be attributed his father's ruin; and although Neal had long since mapped out his future conduct, and looked at ruin philosophically, yet his blood stirred somewhat more rapidly as he went along the passage towards the room that had been indicated.

He touched lightly on the panel of the door.

"Come in!" was responded from the distance; and Neal Galbraith entering, faced his father's foe.

Mr. Tressider was seated at his breakfast-table, enjoying his morning meal, his morning paper, and his luxury of ease. He looked up as Neal advanced, and disclosed a clear, sharply-cut face, thin and lined, and rendered somewhat fierce by two bushy grey eyebrows, surmounting two glittering grey eyes. A man of sixty years, or less perhaps, with an air of intelligence, even refinement, in his face; a tall man, with a cap of Turkish material on his head, to match the dressing-gown in which he was enwrapped; lastly, a very thin man, who had given way in the chest, or the back, or both, and bent forwards in his chair.

Neal walked at once towards Mr. Tressider, shrank for an instant at the thin white hand extended to him, then took it, and held it for an instant in his own.

"So we bury the hatchet, and smoke the pipe of peace, young Sir? But perhaps you do not smoke?"

"Not at present."

"Will you sit down for a few moments? I have a little to say to you."

Neal complied, and faced his master. The black eyes of the youth did not falter beneath the steady, intent gaze of the principal, but looked boldly and fearlessly back at him.

"You are like your letter," Mr. Tressider said at last.

"I do not understand you, Sir."

"Frank, fierce, and determined, I mean. You send me an extraordinary epistle, acknowledging that you bear me no good will, and accusing me of your father's downfall. You speak of the father's ill health, as though I could have helped him going to law, and trying to impair my digestion by his writs of injunction; you compliment me somewhat bitterly, it is true, on my victory—such as it was—and you ask me to make atonement by placing you in a way to get your own living, and assist your father, who has become a sufferer by his obstinacy."

"He was in the right, Sir."

"I may dispute that fact—wrong or right, the case is ended; and the lawyers are enjoying another oyster, and have found a new Galbraith and Tressider to partake of the shells. You don't want to argue the point with *me*?"

"No, Sir."

"You are content with the result?"

"I am resigned to it, Sir."

"Resignation is half-brother to contentment—so much the better. You are not fond of novels or theatres, I hope?"

"I have not time for either, Sir."

"But are you fond of them?"

"Well—no."

"Then your head is not likely to be turned by a fine scheme for retributive justice? You are not the family avenger, waiting to pay me out for old scores, as the avengers do in books and plays?"

"No, Sir."

"No hidden motive in coming here?"

"My motive was explained fairly in the letter."

"I believe it—more, I am sorry for your father's trouble, although I never let other people's troubles disturb me. It's a horrible plan, and wears one out like wildfire. You said in your sharp, acrid missive—upon my honour, I like that letter very much!—that it was my duty to give you a chance of a clerkship in London. For the sake of argument, I will say that it *was* my duty—here you are, what do you think of your place?"

"I shall like it, if there's plenty to do."

"Oh! you want plenty to do, to get the superfluous energy out

of your system? We shall be busy presently—we take things by jumps here. We have a foundry at Birmingham, and when that's in full swing we work away busily in this place. At present we're a trifle slack."

One corner of Mr. Tressider's mouth twitched spasmodically, and he hastened to disguise that weakness by his large breakfast-cup. Then he looked at Neal again.

"You are a bad temper, I should think?" he said.

"I used to be a little hasty—I have learned to break myself of that habit," answered Neal.

"You are a man, I should think, too, who would work his way in the world in good time. I suppose you resolved to come to London and make your fortune?"

"To come to London, at all events."

"Supposing that I had refused your request—thought no more of your cool suggestion?"

"I should have come to London all the same."

"Exactly. I can see firmness, or pigheadedness, expressed in your countenance. That will do for the present, Mr. Galbraith; you can return to your desk. Mr. Pike will instruct you in your duties. You will like Mr. Pike very much, or detest him very much, according to the impression he makes upon you. He's an odd fish!"

Neal was hesitating whether to withdraw or not, when Mr. Tressider said:

"What is it?"

"Sir?" said Neal, interrogatively.

"You have something more to say—speak out, and then we shall start fairly."

"The fact is, Sir, my father is ignorant that I am in your service—he will probably for ever remain ignorant that I have stooped so low as to ask a favour, or claim a right, at your hands," said Neal. "His mind is very weak, and, God help him, it is very easy to deceive him! I tell you this in case of accidents, in order that you may not be surprised at my friends' ignorance of my mode of living."

"Why, what shall I ever know of your friends?"

Neal coloured.

"Probably nothing, but strange things occur in life."

"Ah! more things than are dreamed of in our philosophy—exactly. I'll keep your secret. May I ask one question?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Has your father a very great horror of me?"

"Your name is coupled with his ruin—you hurled him from independence to indigence. Oh! Sir, he was so noble and clever a man, until you broke down his mind as well as his banker's account."

Mr. Tressider sat with his hands clasped upon his knee. At the last words of our hero those hands knit together more closely, though

the face betrayed no emotion, and seemed impervious to impression.

"Your father, like yourself, was inclined to be firm," he said, after a pause. "I offered compensation at the outset—I offered to buy his patent at half the sum he wished—I did my best to arrange things amicably."

"Sir, you might have bought his patent at his own price, or given it up altogether. You had no right to use it, and not pay him for it. It was a rob——"

Neal paused in this strong assertion. He had forgotten his place, and he had promised himself that he would always remember *that*.

"Robbery!" added Mr. Tressider; "well, call it a robbery, if you like. It takes a sharper lance than yours to pierce the hide of a rhinoceros. But I was not alone in the robbery—other men had adopted your father's principle, English as well as foreign, and I could not be left in the background for the sake of an idea, and chased clean out of the trade. Your father was unfortunate enough to pitch upon me for an example, and I fought my battle with him to the last!"

"Not to the last, Sir; had we carried it on to the last, we should have been victorious. Every step was a dear victory on our side—but it was a victory still."

"And ended in collapse—a strange result of victory sometimes."

"You had the longer purse, Sir, and—we fell!"

"It was a game of Beggar my Neighbour, and I won by the odd card. And by all that's holy in commerce, I have never seen much to rejoice at. Well, we sink the by-gones, Mr. Galbraith, and begin afresh."

"Yes, Sir—if I can."

"You bear no malice and hatred in your heart, as the Catechism says?"

"No, Sir."

"Presently you will love me, your neighbour, like yourself—eh?"

"No Sir—I think not."

"You will make use of me as a stepping-stone, and when a better place offers itself, and just as you are becoming useful to me, you will take it?"

"Yes, Sir. I must advance in life—I must get on."

"Then take my advice, and don't be so fond of the sound of your own voice. Next to the Great Plague, is the Great Pest of Prattle."

"You will not find me *prattle* much, Sir," said Neal stiffly; "I have been led into conversation, not thrust my conversation upon you."

"Oh! I don't regret this charming interview in the least—I have been curious to see a Galbraith, delighted with the piquancy of our position towards each other. Where does your father live?"

"Pardon me, but that is at present a secret."

"Very well. Get back to business, and try and deserve your

salary. You asked for a fair trial—if after trial you are found wanting, it is more than likely that you will be found missing too.”

“I only ask for a *fair* trial, Sir.”

“You shall have it. Shut the door after you, please—I am subject to rheumatism.”

When Neal had complied with his request, Mr. Tressider sat with his hands clasped upon his knee in the old position, very statuesque and thoughtful. After awhile he rose and shook himself, as though to shake from his mind the thoughts which had weighed upon him.

“I almost wish he had not come,” muttered the principal.

CHAPTER VII.

FELLOW-CLERKS.

NEAL GALBRAITH was not long in mastering the intricacies of the books—the new system invented expressly for that establishment by David Pike, Esq., senior clerk. The books were small, the system after all was not intricate, the items were sparsely scattered through the pages, the dates of business transactions few and far between. Neal was perplexed more by the want of business, by the absence of that noise and bustle inseparable from business, than by the demand upon his energies.

He could not understand the stagnant character of Mr. Tressider's trade. Had Mr. Tressider met with retributive justice from other hands than his, and “gone to the wall” with better and higher principled men?—was the shadow of trouble hanging over the place, or was it peculiar to all businesses, Shad Thames way? Neal was new to London, and to wholesale trades; he should understand them both presently, and with them Mr. Tressider's way of managing affairs.

The whole place bore the air of getting on badly, Neal was convinced—few people came in and out of the warehouse across the yard; David Pike appeared to have little to do at the desk, but that might have been pretence, for what Neal knew to the contrary; the messenger, Radwick, asked for half a day's leave, and got it; Mr. Walter Tressider did not come back till three in the afternoon, and then he walked up and down the office with a play-book in his hand.

“Nothing new, I suppose, Pike?” he asked once, as he passed the senior clerk's desk.

“No, Sir.”

“Governor at home still?”

"Yes, Sir."

Mr. Walter Tressider shut up his book, and came to Neal's desk once more.

"You're the son of that gentleman with whom my uncle had such a plaguety long law-suit, I suppose?"

"The same."

"I thought so, although my uncle did not enlighten me. He never enlightens me about anything, for the matter of that," he added, a little aggrieved; "but still it was easy to make a good guess in this instance. But what made you begin life here?"

"Your uncle got the better of my father—and I thought he might take pity on the vanquished."

"Take pity—that's a good joke!" said Tressider, laughing; "I never knew him pity anything or anybody. He's as hard as nails, Sir!"

"I should imagine so."

"But that does not matter to you, who haven't the misfortune to live with him—you'll get your money and be free after six. By George! how I am grumbling—that's my weakness, perhaps. You are not fond of theatricals—are you?"

Neal wondered at this question for the second time that day.

"Not very."

"No decided objection, like—old Pike?" dropping his voice a little.

"No—why do you ask?"

"Oh! for no particular reason;" and Mr. Tressider, after a few more commonplaces, left the counting-house for the day.

Neal went home about five, Mr. Pike accompanying him as far as London Bridge, saying very little in the way of conversation, and behaving somewhat clumsily in the street, as though something on his mind rendered him inattentive to outward circumstances.

At the foot of London Bridge, he reached forth his hand and said,

"Good-night."

"Good-night, Sir."

"You are a young man beginning life," he said suddenly, and in a very embarrassed way; "would you—would you mind just reading *this*?"

He dived into his pocket, and produced a dingy paper, of a suspicious tract-like appearance.

"I'll read it, to oblige you. What is it?—a tract?"

"Yes. It can't do any harm to read it, you know."

"No, not much," said Neal, doubtfully; "but why do you think I stand in need of a tract, Mr. Pike?"

"We all stand in need of good advice, Mr. Galbraith. One can't be too careful in these times about our simplest steps in life."

"N—no."

"You're very young, and young men are easily influenced—I was myself at your age, almost laughed into doing wrong. Very dreadful, wasn't it?"

"Very."

"And if you have a father to support, you damage him as well as yourself, by any indiscretion."

"You fancy that I'm very weak-minded, Mr. Pike."

"No, I don't. I fancy you are—don't be offended—a little self sufficient, and that's a weakness."

"Yes," said Neal, colouring; "I suppose it is."

"I'm the head clerk at Tressider's, and you must put up with a little patronage and advice, Mr. Galbraith," he said gently; "I always give the best advice in my power to those with whom I am likely to be friends."

"And how is the advice received, Sir?" asked Neal a little saucily.

"Very badly indeed, as a rule. But my ill-success don't daunt me—I'm never daunted—I keep on advising, whenever I have a chance. Good-night, again!"

"Good-night, Sir."

Neal resumed his homeward route, puzzled to account for Mr. Pike's ready interest in him, as he had been puzzled in other matters more than once that day. He looked at the title of the tract he still carried in his hand, and read:—"On the Dangers of Worldly Acquaintances."

"This Pike's a humbug," muttered Neal, striding along; "but I'll keep my word, and read his tract. I wonder if it's his own composition, and with whom he is afraid that I shall become acquainted? Young Radwick, whose head I shall have to punch before he suits my ideas of civility, or young Tressider, my employer's relative, and a cut above the Galbraiths? A pleasant face, that one might take to for a friend's if friendships were not too expensive a luxury for me to cultivate. Hollo!"

Neal Galbraith might well give vent to this last expletive, for in the heart of the Borough he came face to face with his father, who was advancing rather feebly towards him, with a disturbed expression of countenance.

"You must not do this, Sir—upon my word, father, this won't do at any price."

"Ah! is that Neal?—I am so glad that I have found you—I was coming a little way to meet you."

"Don't try it again, or you'll get lost. Mrs. Higgs should have known better than this," he added.

"She's preparing the tea, and don't know that I have started, Neal," said Mr. Galbraith. "I—I was afraid that you might lose yourself in these streets, and never find your way back to me."

"Trust me for that."

"I was coming right, you see."

"Yes, but don't do this again, or I shall be very angry," said Neal.

The father hung his head at the son's reproof, as the son had hung his in the old days, when the strength of mind was on the other side.

"I thought that it would please you, Neal."

"No—it don't."

"Then I'll keep at home until I get stronger, boy. Every day I feel less muddled—oh! much less! And if I become hale and strong again—what a rare time for you and me!"

"We shall both be grateful, I'm sure."

Neal drew his father's arm within his own, and took him home-wards very carefully. In his kindness for his father there was an intense earnestness that was touching. When he had brought his father to their Fife Street lodgings, and he was alone with Mrs. Higgs in the parlour, he startled that well-meaning old lady by his fiercer face.

"I asked you to take care of my father, not to let him wander about the streets, and come to harm—and you promised. Will you keep your word or not?"

"To be sure I will, all I can, Sir," said Mrs. Higgs meekly—"it's not mentioned in the account, but I'll do it, for the sake of the 'spect I have always borne him. Please don't look like that—you mind me so uncommon of my brother-in-law at his worst."

Neal was pacified by the remonstrance—even ashamed of his own sternness.

"I don't know why I should be angry with you either—my father's vagaries are not your business; you are not paid to wait upon them, and I cannot afford an attendant, even if I thought he wanted one. You mustn't mind my ill-temper, Mrs. Higgs—I've a touch of the brute in me!"

"I don't believe it—you'll do well enough—so will he. We shall jog on in Fife Street."

Neal thought so too, when Fife Street had become more like home, and one could believe that the lodging-houses, milliners, and cheap day-schools in the place were part of the home surroundings. Presently the change from the country would not strike so keenly, and by every little effort it would be easy to imagine that this shabby-genteel neighbourhood, with a back view of a madhouse, was desirably situated, and at a convenient distance from business. He would soon become acclimatised to this—before he had dropped so low, he had fancied that he was *quite* prepared!

At the office next day, doing a little business, and waiting for more; becoming oppressed with the thought that the long law-suit—prosecuted from court of appeal to court of appeal, and brought at last to the House of Lords, where his father fell before the suit was tried, and judgment went in default—had helped to ruin Mr. Tressider as

well as Mr. Galbraith. The trade, Shad Thames way, appeared to Neal to be declining—a few letters in the morning to write, a few minor accounts to post into the ledger, and then it was hard work to get through the day. For what reason did this Mr. Tressider want another clerk? Neal promised himself to be patient; no one seemed excited by the slackness of business, or prophesied any change, and he could afford to wait a little while.

In the afternoon Mr. Walter Tressider came towards Neal, in a confused manner.

"I say, Galbraith," he said, biting the nails of his left hand nervously, "it is early days to ask a favour of you, isn't it?"

"What favour is it?"

"Well, it's an uncommon favour, too, and will very much surprise you. But when young men get together—and gentlemen's sons too, I think I may add—the sooner they are friendly and all that, the better. I want you to join our club."

"Oh! that's impossible."

"We have been getting up, amongst a few of us, a little theatrical company—quite private—and entirely for the amusement of ourselves and friends. It's capital fun, and scarcely any expense."

"It's not in my line," answered Neal; "my histrionic abilities would only put you all to the blush."

"Oh! we have plenty of muffs," was the careless answer; "not that I consider you a muff, Galbraith," he added, seeing our hero's cheeks flush; "on the contrary, you have such an extraordinary face for the play of emotion, that you'll be worth any money to us. I'm sure that you can act."

"I'm sure that I shall not make the attempt," was the sturdy answer.

"It's not expensive."

"It's not to my taste."

"Will you come and see us rehearse to-night?—you'll find a company of very good fellows. I would no more think of introducing you to a set of snobs, that I would press a fellow who wasn't a gentleman to make one of us."

"Thank you for the indirect compliment, Mr. Tressider, but I really cannot take to the drama."

"You're not a serious young man?" he asked, with visible horror in his face.

"I'm sorry to say, No."

"Pike's a serious young man, you'll find," he added with a laugh; "take care of him! If ever a man tried to make himself out better than other people, it's Pike—though he's not a bad sort, mind. Well, I presume it's no good pressing you any further?"

"Thank you—it really is no good. I am flattered by your singling me out, but our positions are not equal, and I am entirely dependent upon my salary."

"So am I. And what has position to do with it? My name's Tressider, that's all. I'm not likely to be my uncle's heir, or come in for a share of my uncle's money. I'm your fellow-clerk with a hundred and thirty pounds per annum, which, by the blessing of Providence, may be a hundred and fifty some day, when my uncle values me at my just worth."

Neal was somewhat surprised at this revelation; he had almost looked upon Mr. Walter Tressider as a representative of the firm.

Mr. Walter Tressider took Neal's surprise for a change of determination.

"You'll think better of it, Galbraith, won't you?"

"I have a father to support as well as myself—his income is a very small one now—do not ask me to spend a penny on spangles."

Neal spoke with a little hearty contempt; but Walter Tressider did not, or would not perceive it.

"Very well, Galbraith—I like your frankness; I'm of a frank nature myself. I'm going to be particularly frank now, for I have not asked the favour of you yet."

"Indeed!"

"I'm general manager of our company; in fact, though I say it myself, I am the best man of the gang of them. Now, we have been getting up '*Othello*' for a friend—at a friend's house—a little birth-day affair for next Thursday, and hanged if *Cassio* hasn't gone to Margate!"

"He will come back in good time, perhaps."

"Oh! no, he's offended—he wanted to play *Iago*, and as it is at young Jennings's house, young Jennings wanted to play *Iago*, and *Othello* too if he could have managed it. You see Jennings wanted a prominent part."

"Very naturally," said Ned.

"You don't know the play, perhaps? You see——"

"I know the play very well, Mr. Tressider."

"All right; then you know we can't get on without *Cassio*."

"Why don't you——"

"My dear fellow, I'm *Othello*!"

"Where's all the gang that you spoke of just now?"

"They have all parts, except those that are out of town. You see August is such a terrible month to keep people together."

"Ah!" said Neal, becoming somewhat weary of the topic.

"Now, if you'll help us at the pinch—learn *Cassio's* part by Thursday evening, you will save a poor fellow from his friend's reproaches, and the ignominy of a failure."

"You will be able to find a substitute without fixing upon a stranger like me. It is utterly impossible that I can help you."

"There'll be some deuced nice girls there," he added, as his last inducement.

"All the greater reason why I shouldn't make myself a fool before them," replied Neal. "I am obliged, but—I can't."

"Or won't—which?"

"Which you like," said Neal, more coldly. "I cannot give you any other answer."

Walter Tressider went away offended; he had failed in his efforts to persuade, and he had an overweening estimate of his persuasive ability. But he was a man who bore no malice, nevertheless, for in an hour's time he came back to Neal's desk, and asked if he thought that he thoroughly understood the business now."

"Yes; the system is simple enough."

"The governor has been going in for contracts," he said; "and there'll be a rare stir presently amongst us if he succeed in getting any. This is the calm before the storm—we do not always take it quite so easily as this, Galbraith."

As Walter Tressider left the office, his uncle came in from his private room, drawing on a pair of gloves carefully as he advanced. A dapper-looking gentleman he looked out of his dressing-gown, buttoned to the chin in a surtout coat that seemed to render him thinner than ever.

"Anything new, Mr. Pike?"

"Nothing new, Sir."

"What has my scamp of a nephew been amusing you with, Mr. Galbraith—the merits of the last new actor, or the merits of Walter Tressider, Esq.?"

"Neither, Sir."

"Then he is less stage-struck than he used to be. You will find him a very agreeable companion, and nobody's enemy but his own—eh, Mr. Pike?"

"Not his own, I hope, Sir. There are some good traits of character in Mr. Walter."

"Ah; and not a few bad ones; but, then, we are all bad in this world, after our respective fashions; and Walter only flourishes his faults a little more in the face of society. Where's Radwick?"

"Here I am, Sir," said Radwick, looking up with his usual sullen aspect.

"Talking about bad ones, reminds me of your inestimable self. We shall not require your services after Saturday week."

"Very well, Sir."

"We're getting slack; and in slack times we weed out the incapables. I'm a patient man, Radwick, but you've tired me out; and I thank God that I can so easily get rid of you. Good-after-noon!"

Mr. Tressider seldom raised or lowered his voice—all was one peculiar, ringing, metallic intonation, that told of the hardness of his heart, perhaps. He was evidently a man who let but little disturb him; he had boasted of that fortitude in Neal's first interview with

him. He might have dismissed Radwick more kindly, Neal thought; by-and-by perhaps, he should receive his own notice to quit in a similar fashion.

"That's you, Mr. Pike," said Radwick, as the master of the firm stepped into his yard. "I'm not sorry. I never liked the place—it's a beggarly hole enough; and he's poor enough for all his bounce—but it's through you I have got the sack."

"Why, what makes you think that?" and all Mr. Pike's bristly hair seemed to grow more erect beneath the charge against him.

"You told him I was not civil."

"I told him the truth—I always do."

"Oh! of course!" was the ironical answer.

"But I recommended that you should have a fair trial; and I was not prepared for his giving you warning this afternoon."

"Yes, you were."

"You won't believe my word, then?"

"No."

"Then don't. I'm very glad you're going, now."

And Radwick went in due course; and has but been introduced herein to afford an early instance of Mr. Tressider's decisiveness. Neal did not understand his master any more than the reader understands him. Neal could not make anyone out very clearly; there was a foggy atmosphere in this new world of his. He had been faintly flattered by Mr. Walter Tressider's offer of close companionship, and Mr. Pike's interest in him was not wholly unpleasant, though it consisted of warnings and presentation tracts. Mr. Pike, packing up that evening his oil-skin bag, which invariably held a bottle of table-beer, a packet of sandwiches and a penny-loaf, said to our hero, as he was brushing his hat with his sleeve before departure—

"I'm very glad to see you so firm. I thought that you were of an unyielding disposition; and the tract has helped you a bit, I dare say."

"I haven't had time to look at it yet."

"You'll be pleased with its style," said Mr. Pike; "very simple, but very clear. I'm not going your way to-night. It's my Addie's birthday, and I know a shop in Dockhead where things are very reasonable. Good-day!"

Mr. Pike hurried away, and Neal went home alone, meeting not with his father by the way. The next day Mr. Walter Tressider did not appear at business until four in the afternoon; he had been rattling about town all day after "the properties," he told Neal. He was in excellent spirits also; a *Cassio* had been found in another quarter, and all was flowing on peacefully and gently to a favourable consummation. On the Thursday he sat at his desk all day, learning his part from a dogs-eared book, which he hid under the ledger when his uncle entered, but which he made no attempt to conceal from the senior clerk.

That senior clerk at last remonstrated.

"Has that estimate been copied, Mr. Tressider?"

"To-morrow will do for that, Pike," was the careless answer.

"It's not required to be sent in until the beginning of next week. It's all right."

"Your uncle wishes to see a fair copy this afternoon."

"Can't—can't Galbraith knock it off?"

"No."

"You might oblige a fellow for once, Pike."

"If you were profitably employing your time, I might—as it is, I really cannot."

"Then you must do the other thing, Mr. Pike," said Walter, severely. "It isn't very often I ask a favour of anybody, and when I do I object to being burked. This isn't a cut at you, Galbraith," he called across Mr. Pike's desk, "for not helping me at a pinch. I forget, forgive, and am 'hail fellow well met!' the very instant after my enemy has tried to rip me up the back in the dark. Here, Pike, I'll forgive you, and subscribe to the next collection at that little howling-shop in your street. What a row they make of a Sunday morning, to be sure!"

"That'll do, Mr. Tressider—that'll do, please," said David Pike, somewhat flustered.

"Well, but they do howl horribly, Pike."

"Never mind, it'll be your turn to howl Shakspeare to-night, and for your friends to sneer at *you*!"

Mr. Tressider did not relish the retort, but he laughed off the effect, after a moment's consideration.

"I shall make a success of it."

"All the worse for you, Sir."

"Why?"

"It will be one step further on the devil's road, and you'll make it rejoicingly. Oh! why don't you give up this play-acting folly, and turn to something more serious, if you must have a hobby? It's wrong—upon my honour, Mr. Tressider—it's really wrong!"

"You think so, really?"

"I do, indeed!" said David Pike, quite earnestly; "even in a worldly sense, it's wrong for you. It gives you unbusiness-like habits, and makes honest work toilsome. When ever you leave your uncle, you will find how right I am."

"But I have promised to-night. I can't break my word, you know. Afterwards I will really think seriously of what you have said. Here's the estimate, Mr. Pike, and I am very much obliged to you."

He passed the papers on to the desk of his fellow-clerk, and Mr. Pike, after a bewildered look at him, and a half-protest against the imposition, suffered them to remain where they were, and shortly afterwards turned his attention to them.

This kept Mr. Pike late at his post, and Neal went home alone again. He took his father that night for a walk in St. James's Park, and came back as the clocks were striking nine.

Mrs. Higgs admitted them into the house, and followed them up stairs to their drawing-room. She was looking pale and agitated.

"Keep your hat on, Master Neal, I want you to help an old woman and a young one—me and my niece. Will you?"

"To be sure I will."



CHAPTER VIII.

SPECIAL SERVICE.

A SHORT, thick-set, hard-featured man, shabbily attired, and wearing a napless hat, short and thick-set, like himself, had stumped down Fife Street half an hour before, and knocked at Mrs. Higgs's door.

Mrs. Higgs had stared aghast at her visitor, and asked if anything were wrong; and her visitor had not condescended to afford any information until he had entered her parlour, and sat down with his hands in his pockets, and his inflexible hat pulled over his brows. He sat in the full light of the window, and discovered a dirty face as well as a hard one, looking a trifle more dusky for his stubbly chin, and ratty-grey whiskers, which hung at all lengths about his soiled shirt-collar. Altogether an unpleasant man to look at, and a worse to speak to.

"Well, who would have thought of you giving me a call, Webber?" Mrs. Higgs said.

"I thought of it, or I shouldn't have been here, should I?" was the reply to this.

"Looking at it in that light, Mr. W., praps not."

"Where's Carry?"

Mrs. Higgs was quick to respond, quick to see the screw loose in the social machinery of home; and although as ignorant of Carry's whereabouts as the gentleman addressing her, answered quite smartly—

"Didn't she tell you that she was going shopping for me?"

"Shopping!—what have you sent her shopping for?"

"She's more taste than I have, and is quite able, I think, to choose a bright meriner for me, which it'd look suitable for my age—and the Lord forgive me all these heaps of 'varications!' " she added, in a lower tone.

Mr. Webber gave a grunt, and sat scowling at the carpet

ferociously. He looked up at last, and said with an emphatic nod:

"I'll wait till she comes back, then."

"She can find her way home well enough—you needn't be afraid of the crossings."

"I never was."

"I thought something had happened at home, you coming here so seldom as you do."

"What have I got to come here for?"

"Well—nothing much," Mrs. Higgs was compelled to reply.

"I've come here for Carry, because I thought that she'd been up to her tricks, and wanted to do me. And I aint to be done, like her fool of a mother!"

"No," said Mrs. Higgs, in a negative sort of affirmative response.

"And not to be done by my own gal as brought me here—not any wish to see you—don't flatter yourself!"

"I don't."

"And don't give me any of *your* sharp answers, because I never could stomach them. I'm plain, matter-of-fact, to the purpose, Josiah Webber—a man who always speaks his mind!"

"I'm not thinking of being sharp, Webber—why should I? Will you take anything?—will you take your hat off?"

"I won't take either one or the other—I'll take Carry home when I have got a chance."

"If she's gone to the West End shops—she'll be rather late. You don't get first-class meriners this end of the town."

"Mrs. Higgs, I can't recollect at any time your telling me a downright lie," said Mr. Webber, crossing his arms upon his broad chest, and glinting at his sister-in-law from under the rim of his shabby beaver; "or I should be inclined to think that you're at it now, pretty strong."

Mrs. Higgs paled a little at this insinuation, but held her ground still. Had he not looked so intently into her face, he would have perceived the withered hand upon the table shaking very much as it held fast to one corner.

"There's no denying the fact, that Carry is a sly girl—I have always said so—I have always thought so. I think that she was made slyer at that damned boarding-school, where she found lots of fine friends, and got her head turned with their finery. Now, I hate sly people—people who say one thing and mean another."

"Which Carry does not, I hope."

"I don't know that," said this iron being, talking at the top of his voice, which, when at the top, was strong enough for Exeter Hall platform purposes; "she said that she was coming here to spend the afternoon and evening with you—that she promised you last Sunday—and I guessed what little game she was up to,

for I'm pretty sharp in *my* way. Ask anybody who knows Webber, if I aint."

"I wouldn't too readily 'spect my own child, if I was you. It's bad."

"Never you mind what's bad. I don't 'spect, as you call it, for nothing generally," he said, with a withering sneer at his sister-in-law's ignorance; "and I hate anyone trying to impose upon me. Her mother tried it when she was a young woman, but it wouldn't do; Joe tried it before he was a young man, and I turned him out of doors."

"Ah! God help him!—yes," cried the woman, with a pathos that would have affected men more easily impressed than her visitor.

"Ah! you made a fine fuss about that—I didn't. You, being his godmother, thought you had a right to bully me, I suppose, about it. But it served him right—it was his own fault—I've never been sorry for acting so, and being quit of such a scamp!"

"To think a man should talk so of his own son!—oh! I'd rather not listen, Webber. Please, go home!"

"I like to be just, but when I'm just, I'm firm; I put my foot down so," said this harsh man, with a stamp of one unwieldy boot, that shook every window in the house; "and heaven and earth aint likely to make me move it, till I choose!"

"No," said Mrs. Higgs, with one of her strange negative-affirmatives again.

"And if Carry's going after her brother, as though it was in her blood somehow, and all our care can't keep her straight, but only seems to render her more artful—why, you may take care of her if you like, for, by all that's holy, I won't!"

"Mind what you're saying," said Mrs. Higgs; "you can't frighten me with your big words, and I don't care so much for 'em but what I'll speak my mind in my own house. You never 'served a son or daughter, for you only cared to keep 'em down, and you'll 'member all your bad words when you aint so strong and fierce as you are now. You aint kind, Webber, and you never was."

"I like fairness, and I don't get it. If being kind is to spend my money on company-keeping, and dressing Carry out for company, I'm a brute in every sense of the word. And if I don't keep my children down when they're young, won't they fly into my face and spit at me when they're older?—I know the world too well to doubt it."

"You know the worst of the world, I think," said Mrs. Higgs, still hovering on the verge of retort, and too much a woman of spirit to be easily subdued.

"What does Carry want with friends?—*fine friends?*" he added disparagingly; "they're not fit for her or her family. I'm not fine, Johannah isn't fine; I've plenty of money—I do!" mind owning

that—but I'm not going to waste it in keeping up a show for fools to see me spend it. Carry went to boarding-school to finish her education, not to make friends—to be a comfort to me, and not an insult to my understanding, as her mother's grammar is. I didn't want an ignorant girl about the house, but I didn't want a fine, two-faced, deceitful minx as she is."

"Don't say so."

"And you know that she's off, after all, to these Jenningses—that she's as obstinate as a mule, and always was—though where the devil she got her obstinacy from, I don't know. And you want to put *me* on the wrong scent—ha! ha! that's a good joke. Now hark here."

Mrs. Higgs hearkened with great attention.

"I'll wait here till she comes back on your errand, and take her home with me. I'm in no hurry; I'll give her a fair chance—eleven, twelve say. And if she don't come, why, I shall know that you've been lying, and I shan't care to see you at my house again. And at twelve o'clock—a nice time for shopping!—I'll go home and lock up, and she may call in the morning for my good opinion of her."

At this juncture the knock came, and Mr. Webber for a minute looked discomfited.

"My lodgers, I think," said Mrs. Higgs; and then had ensued the lodgers' admittance, and the hurried adjuration as recorded at the end of the last chapter.

"To be sure I will help you. What is it?" asked Neal.

"My niece has gone without telling her father or mother to a party at Richmond, and her father has found it out. He's a very stern man, quite a brute, though I say it myself, and the Lord knows what may be the 'sult of this. I've told him, Heaven forgive me, more lies to-night than I ever hope to tell again to save that gal—for oh! he's mortal hard, and I know what he did to his own son, who might have been so different! He may turn her out of doors a'most, or say things that'll make her turn herself out, for she is as obstinate as he is. You, Master Neal, will go to Richmond by the train from Vauxhall, and bring her here at once just as if she had been a-shopping, as I've told him, mind—oh dear! And make all the haste you can, for he goes home at twelve to lock her out, and then who knows what may happen? There's a good lad—quietly down the stairs—the name's Jennings—they've a villa at Richmond—Mark's Villa—you're sure to find it."

Mrs. Higgs dashed down stairs again, and Neal prepared to obey her behest, catching her excitement partly.

"This is an odd affair," he said.

"Very odd!" replied his father, to his astonishment; "very wrong of the girl—very wrong of the father—all wrong together, Neal!"

"You understand it."

"Yes, I think so."

"It hasn't excited you in any way, father?"

"N—no. Mrs. Higgs runs in and out rather suddenly, and startles one—that's all."

"Then I'll just see you into bed before I go, or I shall find you in Fife Street by the time I come back. Come, father."

"Bed!"

"You're tired—you've had a long walk—early to bed is the Galbraith motto, dad."

"But I have had no supper."

"Mother Higgs shall bring it you when you are comfortably disposed of—this way, Sir—I've no time to lose."

The father bowed to the will of his son; there was no resisting it, he felt assured, so he went to bed obedient and uncomplaining. Neal saw his father comfortably tucked up, and then, with an injunction to get to sleep till supper-time, which was faithfully promised, Neal went softly down the stairs and out of the house.

"This is an odd turn, and an odd story," said Neal; "but it will save no end of confusion, and here goes in search of adventures! I don't know how many nieces Mrs. Higgs possesses, but I hope it's the fair-haired one who refused my consolation on Sunday last."

Off went Neal at a rapid pace, till he came to the cab-stand between Bethlehem Hospital and the "Stags" public-house in the Kennington Road.

"I suppose Mrs. Higgs will stand all expenses," said this prudent youth. "Richmond isn't far, I hope—and there's the girl to bring back—I hope the money will run to it. Richmond!—Jennings!—by George! it must be the private theatrical party Walter Tressider mentioned. How did Mrs. Higgs's niece manage to get there?"

He was in the cab, and rattling towards Vauxhall Station by that time—up Kennington Road, and Upper Kennington Lane, and there he was at the railway station.

"Next train to Richmond, when is it?" he cried to the first official whom he met in the booking-office.

"Train just up, Sir."

"Too late!" cried the clerk, endeavouring to drop the trap before the pigeon hole, and stopped by Neal's strong hand.

"No, it isn't!" shouted Neal; "pass us a ticket—I'll chance it—life and death, Sir—third class return, there's a good fellow!"

The clerk, carried away by our hero's excitement, passed the ticket as requested, and Nealscourged up the steps, on to the platform, and into the first open door of the train, now slowly moving on—into the guard's compartment, along with the break, and considerably astonishing the guard, who had jumped in after him, and closed the door.

"Hallo, here!"

"All right—I'm in a hurry, and I should have missed the train. I wouldn't have missed it for any money."

"Praps not, but you oughtn't to have come in here—it's against the rules—it's likely to get me in a row."

"If you had a grandmother dying to see you, and dying of dropsy, you wouldn't stand upon ceremony?" said Neal.

"Oh! if it's as bad as that," said the man, softening, "I've nothing to say."

"I have caught this lying complaint of Mother Higgs," muttered Neal to himself, as the train whirled him along through the night. He was soon at Richmond; reckless of expenditure, he dashed at the only fly waiting at the station, and was wrenching open the door, when arrested by the flyman.

"Hold hard there, Sir!—engaged, Sir! Waiting for a gentleman by this train."

"The deuce you are!" said Neal; "where's Mark's Villa?"

"A mile and a arf good," said the flyman—"are you going there?"

"Yes—which way—I'll run it."

"The race is not always to the swift, Mr. Galbraith."

Neal jumped, and faced the speaker, no less a personage than the senior Mr. Tressider.

"Good-evening, Sir—you are going to see your nephew perform, I hope."

"U-u-u-ugh! I hope not," said Mr. Tressider, with a shudder;

"I am going down late on purpose to avoid that inflection."

"I am sent on a message to the villa—may I ride on the box?"

"Certainly not."

"Sir, I——"

"But you may get inside with me—look sharp, and don't keep me in the draught."

Master and servant entered the fly, and away they went once more. Mr. Tressider loosened the buckle of the cloak he was wearing, took his hat off, and then curled himself so far back in the carriage, that he was almost invisible to Neal.

"You know the Jennings lot, Mr. Galbraith?"

"No, Sir."

"Mr. Jennings is in the metal trade—a very wealthy man. You may have heard your father speak of him?"

"No, Sir."

"This is a singular meeting," said Mr. Tressider, after a pause.

"You are not bound on a mission of pleasure, I can see!"

It was difficult to see much in that dark interior, but Mr. Tressider had good eyes.

"No, Sir. I am here to oblige a friend, and escort a lady back with me—that's all."

"What lady?"

"Miss Webber."

"Ah! I don't know her. It's all very singular, but I'm not a curious man, and singular things are better avoided, although I never let them excite me. Shall we change the subject?"

"If you please, Sir."

"My nephew did not make an actor of you after all, then?"

"I could not afford the time, Sir; and I am not fond of acting."

"It's a nice amusement—for young people idly disposed," said Mr. Tressider. "Old people, like me, attend these revels for the sake of the supper, or for the sake of old friends whom they may meet at the reunion. You do not stay?"

"Not five minutes, if I can avoid it!"

"The fly shall wait for you. I have engaged the equipage for the night, and there's no extra expense. Don't you find it jolt very much?"

"Not so springy as it might be, Sir."

"Once upon a time I should have come down here in my own carriage; but I have given up the vanities of life. I begin to fancy that I can't afford them."

"How far are we now, Sir?"

"I really cannot tell—we shall be there in good time. I was awake all last night—do you mind my having a nap?" he asked, quite courteously.

"Not at all, Mr. Tressider."

"Thank you—you're very good."

Mr. Tressider went to sleep, or was silent for the rest of the journey. In due course the wheels of the fly grated on the gravelled drive skirting a house, whose many windows were full of light, and significant of revelry.

The door was opened before they were out of the fly—a man with a lantern, letting down the steps, looked at Neal's shooting-jacket with evident distrust. To the man at the open door Neal tendered his card, on which he had found time to write, *Immediate and important!*

"Give that card to Miss Webber, off or on the stage, and show me to a private room, where I can see that lady alone. Off or on the stage remember."

"Ye-es, Sir."

A gentleman crossing the hall in full-dress, old and shrivelled, like an American apple, caught sight of Mr. Tressider.

"Ah! Tressider," he said, advancing, "so you have favoured us, then? They're doing it very well indeed."

"What! haven't they finished? They began early enough!"

"They're getting on. Who—who's this?" in a lower voice.

"Oh! a friend whom I have dropped upon *en route*—Mr. Galbraith."

"Gal—Galbraith! Good Gad! Sir, did you say Galbraith?"

Mr. Tressider gave a quiet chuckle of satisfaction at his friend's astonishment.

"Only a messenger on special service—singular coincidence—son of Old Bill Gal, as we used to call him. Shall I introduce you?"

"No, no. James, show this young gentleman into the breakfast-room, and attend to his wishes."

"This way, Sir."

Neal was ushered along the whole extent of the hall by the lackey.

"I'm bewildered, Tressider. Is it a message to me?" said Mr. Jennings. "What does it mean?"

"It's nothing to do with you, my dear Sir, and therefore means nothing. He's something like his father about the forehead, but not quite so top-heavy. Don't you think so?"

"I—I don't know. There he goes—into the breakfast-parlour, and I forgot that—that—they had made a dressing-room of it behind the stage. What a fool I am!"

"History does not say so, Jennings," remarked his friend.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ANTI-CLIMAX.

THE breakfast-parlour of the Jennings's establishment communicated by a side-door with the dining-room, in which a stage had been erected for the proper performance of Shakspeare's "Othello," consequently the breakfast-parlour had been turned into a green-room for the occasion, and had been found very handy for entrances and exits.

Neal was unprepared for a green-room—still less for a number of gentlemen, and one lady, in masquerade attire, waiting their cues, and standing in groups together. There was a general stare of astonishment in his direction as the door closed, and shut him in with this motley crew of players.

Neal bowed somewhat clumsily in his confusion, looked round for a friendly face, and failed in finding it.

"I beg pardon," said Neal; "I requested a private room, in which to see Miss Webber for an instant."

"Hush! hush!" said *Iago*, evidently *Iago*; he had corked his eyebrows so bountifully; "you'll be heard in the dining room, and spoil it. Miss Webber's on the stage."

"Where's young Mr. Tressider?"

"He's going to do the smothering—for goodness' sake, don't talk so loud! Is anything the matter?"

"I must see Miss Webber at once—I regret to interrupt your piece, but it is important in the highest degree that I should see her."

"It'll all be over in ten minutes," said *Iago*, with tears in his eyes; "do talk a little lower, there's a good fellow, or you'll mull it all!"

"Who is it?" asked *Emilia*—*Emilia* for the present, Miss Jennings after the fifth act; "why don't you introduce me?"

"I don't know him—do keep quiet. 'Too late's' your cue. Why don't you listen?" snapped *Iago*, just as *Iago* was prone to snap *Emilia* in the side scenes of Venetian life, perhaps.

The voice of Walter Tressider was heard reverberating through the door—followed by Miss Webber's voice—the last conjugal dispute between *Othello* and *Desdemona* was rapidly progressing.

Othello.—*Think on thy sins.*

Desdemona.—*They are loves, I bear to you.*

Othello.—*Ay! and for that, thou dy'st.*

Des.—*That death's unnatural that kills for loving.*

Alas! why gnaw you so your nether lip?

Some bloody passion shakes your very frame:

These are portents; but yet I hope, I hope,

They do not point on me.

Othello.—*Peace and be still!*

Des.—*I will so. What's the matter?*

"If you please, Miss Webber," cried a sonorous voice at this juncture, "I was to give you this at once. The gentleman's waiting."

A long pause of dismay on the stage, in the dressing-room, in the dining-room, where the visitors were sitting, and then one long, loud, unextinguishable burst of laughter, that seemed to rock the house. The servant had fulfilled his commission by coolly stepping on the stage and parting husband and wife with a salver.

In an instant, Walter Tressider, with a black face, rushed in a frenzy to the green-room.

"Who's doing is this?—that cursed flunkey!—lower the curtain!—what the devil does it all mean?—here's a pretty mess!"

Desdemona came in the instant afterwards—the laughter was still at its height, echoing peal after peal on the ears of the dismayed players. *Desdemona*, or Miss Webber, flushed, excited, and bewildered, with her hair dishevelled, and in her white dress looking very beautiful, followed *Othello*. The servant came running after them, full of horror at the deed he had committed, and was immediately garotted by *Iago*.

"You thundering, blundering blackguard! what do you mean by this?" yelled his young master in his ears.

"You are from Fife Street!—what has happened?—what do you want here?" cried Miss Webber to our hero.

"I have been sent for you—it is very important that you should return home at once with me."

"Nobody ill—dead!—father!—mother!—Joe?"

"No, no—pray calm yourself—nothing has occurred of so serious a nature as that!"

"Then if nobody's dead, it's a damned shame!" said *Othello*; "and—why, it's Galbraith!"

"Miss Webber, will you step this way with me, for an instant?" said Neal; "I cannot explain before this lady and these gentlemen."

Caroline Webber, turning white and red, followed our hero to the door. She was trembling with fear, or passion, or both, and yet excited by the mystery. The cool hall was quiet enough for the news.

"Mrs. Higgs has sent me—your father is waiting at her house. He is likely to be very angry if you remain from home any longer."

"Does he know that I am here?"

"I believe that he only suspects it, Mrs. Higgs having hinted that—that you were absent shopping for her."

"I can't go home like this—I won't go home!"

"Pray think better of it," urged Neal, "he returns home at twelve to lock you out, I'm told. You must forgive me delivering such a message to a lady."

"Lock me out!" mused Caroline, her face becoming scarlet for a moment, and then deadly pale; "well, let him."

Yes, she inherited her father's obstinacy of temperament—her red lips closed together with decision, and her little hands doubled themselves into balls of snow, that no sun seemed ever likely to melt.

"Let him—let him!" she repeated.

Miss Jennings appeared in this instant from the dressing-room.

"May I ask *what* is the matter, Carry?"

"My foolish wish to keep my promise and not spoil your play, has been found out—and, after all, I have covered you with shame!"

"Oh! never mind that—we've amused the people by our new reading, and they're laughing still. We shall laugh presently—your father knows you have come here."

"Yes."

"Then I would go back to him—I would go at once, Carry dear."

"I don't like to be served like this—to be treated like a slave—a child without a will or a wish of my own!"

"Miss Webber," said Neal, "I'm afraid that it is nearly eleven o'clock."

"Perhaps I had better go," said Carry, dashing her angry tears away; "have you a fly outside?"

"Yes."

"I'll be with you in five minutes."

Carry Webber hurried away with her friend, and Neal went out of the hall to the fly, and took his place, like a good young man who valued appearances, upon the box. He alighted to assist Miss Webber into the vehicle, when she came hurrying out of the house a few minutes afterwards. A rapid drive to the station, Neal enlisting the flyman's sympathy by the way—and then Miss Webber on the platform, and our hero procuring her a ticket, and inquiring about the next train.

He came quite joyfully towards her at last.

"Good luck, Miss Webber!" he cried; "there's a train in five minutes, that goes direct to Waterloo without stopping, and it wants twenty minutes to eleven now!"

"That was the train I intended to have returned by."

"You would have missed it."

"Yes—it looks like it now," said she, half petulantly; "but there is another train after this—and I had a hope that father would go to bed early. All this seems very wrong to you, Mr. Galbraith?" she added quickly.

"N—no, not exactly wrong," he replied, politely; "I haven't heard the full particulars—and I only guess that there has been a promise fulfilled on your part, at the hazard of giving great offence to your father."

It was a graceful way of putting it for a youth not twenty years of age, and pleased Miss Webber wonderfully.

"Yes—that is the truth. I should have spoiled their play at Richmond, and I did not think quite so much as I should have done of the dangers of my determination."

"Dangers!"

"Oh! you don't know—you can't guess, Sir, the danger of offending such a father as I am blessed with!" she cried, passionately; "no one ever had such a cold-hearted father before!—I'm the most miserable girl in all the world!"

She burst into tears, wild and uncontrollable, and frightened poor Neal with her impetuosity. He had not seen a young woman cry very often—and it almost made him want to cry to keep her company.

"My dear Miss Webber, don't go on like this—he's a little hard in his way, but you mayn't understand him exactly. A father must love his child, just as naturally as a child must love its father. I can't understand anything clearer than that. What is there to cry about?"

"Let me be a minute—how tiresome you are!"

She went away from him to a corner of the platform, and sat down. Neal did not intrude upon her grief until the train was heard clanking its way towards them.

"Here's the train, Miss Webber. You'll—you'll not object to third-class—I took anything in my hurry."

"I'm used to the worst of everything," she responded, severely.

"Then this will just suit," said Neal, almost severely in his turn.

Neal conducted Miss Webber into a third-class compartment, and took his place beside her. A woman, with a basket, and a soldier with his eyes shut, and his mouth so wide open that his head looked half off, were the other occupants of that compartment. A whistle from the engine, and then at full speed to London.

Carry Webber remained silent and stolid for some time—the place was dark enough, and Neal could not tell, even had she worn no veil, whether she were crying still.

But Carry Webber's nature was an April one, as befitted her youth. A musical laugh suddenly startled Neal, and frightened the soldier for an instant out of slumber.

"Was there ever anything more ridiculous?" she said; "Mr. Tressider making up his mind to murder me, and I playing *Desdemona* with all my heart and soul; and then that stupid servant with your card. I begin to see how the visitors must have enjoyed the variation!"

"I am afraid that it was my fault. I said 'off' or 'on the stage' in my excitement; but I did not want the man to ruin the effect of the catastrophe."

"We were proceeding so famously, too!"

"You are fond of private theatricals?"

"Fond of anything that offers me the prospect of a change, Mr. Galbraith."

"Indeed!"

"For I see no change. I am not allowed to stir out of doors without a hundred questions; it is too expensive to have friends at home—it is too expensive to seek friends abroad. You cannot wonder if I am a little discontented now and then—even, now and then, if I am a little rebellious."

Neal said, out of politeness, that he could not wonder at it.

"But I try to do my best—of course I do! I try to make believe that I am very happy, and contented. What kind of man is *your* father?" she asked abruptly.

"Before his illness, a firm man in his way, but still all that I could wish—ever the dearest and best of fathers to me."

"And your mother?"

"She died when I was a child; but I can remember her—the best of mothers, too."

"What a happy life!—what a different girl I should have been with a mother and father like yours! But then your father was a gentleman once?"

"A gentleman ever, Miss Webber."

"I mean a gentleman in position; and somehow there is a differ

ence between gentlemen born rich, and men who have made themselves rich—don't you think so?"

"Sometimes—not always."

"My father did one foolish thing in life, in giving me 'a finishing education.' He wanted me a clever girl, he said, at any expense; and he should have kept me down, and sent me to some school in the Borough Road. I should have known my place then, and been more content with it."

"I—I wouldn't cry any more, Miss Webber."

"I'm not going—don't be alarmed," she answered, pertly.

"Have you known Mr. Tressider long, Miss?"

It was her turn to start at this.

"Mr. Tressider—why?"

"Because he is a fellow-clerk of mine."

"That's very strange! Do you like him?"

"I have not seen a great deal of him yet. He appears a good-tempered fellow."

"And very clever too! I do not believe that any amateur can play *Othello* like him. I think that he will take to the stage, and become famous."

"He does not think so, I hope?"

"Why?"

"Because it must be rather hard work to become famous," replied our hero.

"He would work his way—he thinks that he is a genius himself."

"Well, that's a little towards it," said Neal, only partly convinced still.

"And he's fit for something better than slaving at a desk all day; besides, he don't agree with his uncle—and he's too good for a clerk."

"Is he, now?"

Our hero did not relish these encomiums on Mr. Walter Tressider; he could not assign a reason for considering Mr. Tressider a distasteful subject, not being aware that no man cares to sit down and hear another very much bepraised.

Miss Webber did not bepraise Mr. Tressider, however, to any inordinate extent; she darted away from the topic to her own griefs once more. She was never reserved upon them; and Neal pitied her, and thought what a dreadful father and mother she must have to put up with. And whilst he was pitying her with all his heart, her musical laugh at that evening's absurdity rang out again.

Close upon the Waterloo Station, she said—

"Now, tell me all the particulars of my father's visit to Mrs. Higgs."

He related them, so far as he had been made acquainted with the same.

"What would you do?"

"I! Oh! I should tell them the truth, and promise not to do it again. I would chance it."

"Would you? And if your father turned you out of doors?"

"He would not do that."

"He turned my brother out of doors because he went a little wrong—not much. He wouldn't give him another chance then—my own brother!"

"Ah! that was different; your brother was a man, who could rough it a bit."

"He was not so old as you by two or three years. He wasn't twenty."

"I am not twenty either, for that matter."

"Oh! dear! What an old-looking boy you are, then!"

"So people tell me."

"And how old you talk!" she said laughing. "But why would not he turn me out of doors? Where's the difference?"

"You're his daughter—too young, and good, and pretty, to be treated roughly. Why, I'm sure he wouldn't be very hard upon *you*!"

They were at the station now, and he could see that Carry Webber was blushing, and not at all displeased by his assertion. It was Neal's candid opinion, and not intended for flattery, so the remark was received all the more gratefully.

"We'll have a cab to the end of Fife Street—shall we?"

"If you please; there's a stationer's open," she said, as they emerged into the Waterloo Road; "wait a minute for me."

She ran across the road, and shortly returned, with a roll of brown-paper in her hands.

"I haven't quite done acting to-night," she said, saucily.

The cab was procured, and soon put them down at the corner of Fife Street. Emerging from the cab it might have been seen that Miss Webber had a large brown-paper parcel in her hands. Neal, who had chastely ridden on the box once more—from what Galbraith had he inherited this modesty?—looked at the parcel with amazement.

"Why, how have you managed it?"

"Never mind, Sir—if you wish to see the last act of this comedy, I give you full permission to listen at the parlour door."

"Thank you," said this unheroic hero of ours. "I think I will."

At Mrs. Higgs's door, and knocking thereat loudly. Mrs. Higgs responded, and would have commenced a hasty whisper, had not Carry forestalled her by talking very loudly, and sweeping her aunt along with her into the parlour.

"Oh! this tiresome merino dress of yours, aunt; I couldn't get a mulberry—a real mulberry—anywhere! I'm worn to death!—I've

been half-way down the Edgeware Road after the thing—what will father say ? ”

Father—sitting exactly in the same position, with his hands in his pockets, and his heavy hat still wedged over his forehead—growled out something, not particularly distinct, about the foolery of it all; and then the door closed; and Neal altering his mind about listening, went up stairs, whistling long and plaintively.

In the drawing-room Neal found the supper-tray laid for him, and after one look at his father above stairs, he descended to partake of the good things which Mrs. Higgs had provided.

He got up from his seat when he heard some one talking in the passage, and opened the window softly to see the last of Carry Webber. Would she think anything more about him?—he suddenly remembered that she had not even bidden him good-night! It had all been a capital joke, this getting the best of old Webber, if he were the brute that everybody said he was, his own daughter included. And he was sure that Miss Webber would not have acted so slyly, unless there had been a reason for it. He was inclined to make every excuse for Miss Webber.

He peeped cautiously out of the window—no, there she was going away with her father, without a thought of him who had taken so much trouble to save her from a scolding. He found that he had come to the window with the bread in his hand, and the happy idea seized him of picking off a small piece from the crusty corner he had cut himself, and dropping it lightly on Carry Webber's bonnet. She would then look up and smile good-night at him.

He leaned out, and, horror of horrors! dropped the whole of his heavy corner crust, which came with a thud on Mr. Webber's hat, and sounded like a cannon-shot in Fife Street.

“Why, what the devil's this!” exclaimed Mr. Webber, stooping to pick up the missile which had rebounded into the road; “here, Mrs. Higgs, the sooner you trot that mad lodger of yours into Bedlam, the better it'll be for him. He's flinging lumps of bread at me!”

Neal had darted back in dismay, knocked his head against the window frame in confusion, and was sitting half-stunned in the corner of the room. So he saw no more of Carry Webber, although he fancied that the old suppressed music of her laugh sounded for an instant in his ears.

He closed the window and resumed his supper after a while.

“What a pretty girl she is!” he murmured; “I wish she hadn't——”

He said no more, but stared before him at the opposite wall, whereon was a framed profile in black paper of Mrs. Higgs of earlier days, when she was a Miss Putnam, and had not been tempted into matrimony.

What did Neal wish that she had not done? That she had not

gone on the sly to Richmond to play *Desdemona*, and deceived her father on her return, recking not of the plainer advice that he had offered her?

We have a right to dive to the innermost depths of a hero's thoughts, and we have, moreover, a great respect for our reader's curiosity. Neal Galbraith wished—that Carry Webber had not called him an old-looking boy!

CHAPTER X.

ADDIE.

Mrs. HIGGS settled accounts with Neal Galbraith the next morning, bringing up a jingling little bag of wash-leather for that purpose. Neal would have preferred to have taken all the credit to himself now, and incurred every atom's worth of the expense; he was inclined to feel very independent when the money question was mooted by his landlady.

"It's—it's always such a difficult thing, Mrs. Higgs, to take money from a lady. I wish——"

"If you think you're going to pay for my niece's gallivantings, you're very much 'taken, Master Neal," she said; "I'll settle with her, and she'll settle with me—and if she don't, why, I shan't regret the money so much as all the awful stories I had to tell last night."

"Is her father very stern, Mrs. Higgs?"

"He might be milder," she said; "he's at his wust when he's put out, and he was at his wust last night. I've knowed him different, just a little—when he's had a good order like."

"What a life for her!—eh, Mrs. Higgs?"

"Yes, but she bears it pretty well—she's fit to cope with him, take it altogether. Though they're my relations, they aint one of 'em as I should like to see 'em; there's something cross-grained in 'em, and it comes out and spiles the pattern."

"But she——"

"She's a nice gal in her way, but put her out of her way, there's a spice of the family in her—and yet I like that gal, as if she was my own flesh and blood. No gal can do better or be more lovable if she likes. There's good and bad in her, as there is in most of us, I 'pose. Where's your father this morning?"

"He's getting up—he'll be down presently."

"There's a difference in him already."

"Do you see it?" said Neal, his face brightening; "I didn't like to ask you quite so soon, but I have fancied so myself."

"He's getting better—you may 'pend upon it he'll come round."

"Oh! the glorious days of his better strength and clearer mind, Mrs. Higgs!" cried Neal; "he taking care of me, instead of me taking care of him—positions changed, and 'as you were,' the last order of the Commanding Officer."

"He must have been a good father, for you to love him so."

"Why, you know what a man he was—and how everybody liked him. And the boy's love hasn't grown less, now the man's—would you really take me for a man now, Mrs. Higgs?" and Neal drew himself up to his full extent.

"To be sure I would."

"Not—an old-looking sort of boy, now?"

"No, a man."

"I have all a man's thoughts—I was a man at sixteen, when the trouble first came, and there was a man's work before me. Ah! good-morning, father—Mrs. Higgs and I were talking about you."

"You're very kind. No backbiting, I hope—no grumbling at the nuisance I am to the two of you."

"Not much of that, at present."

"You'll be late for office, if you don't mind. You should not have waited for me—if I'm a trifle irregular in my rising, still you must learn method and rule, Neal."

"I'll be at the office as the clock strikes nine, Sir."

"That's right."

Neal kept his word. At nine o'clock to the minute, he entered the office, ascending the steps at the same time with David Pike. An interchange of good-mornings, and then real business commencing—for there was a little more briskness about the office that day.

"We've got one contract for iron railings, from Bitts the builders—forty miles of them," said Mr. Pike; "Mr. Tressider will want a letter sent off to Birmingham to-day. It's young Tressider's pattern, too, that is chosen, and that will please *him*. He's a clever young man, but—what's the good of being clever, if one hasn't a mind of his own."

"Hasn't he, then?"

"I am afraid not," said Mr. Pike. "I like a man who goes right on his road, and don't flinch because a storm comes up, or something out of the way attracts him from his first pursuit. That was my father's idea—mine—I hope it'll be yours, young man. But I fancy this is not attending to Mr. Tressider's business."

Mr. Tressider, senior, entered, to attend to his own a few minutes afterwards. The head of the house was irregular in his movements, and it was difficult to be certain of him. Sometimes Mr. Pike would find him at nine in the morning, busy at work at his nephew's desk, as though early-rising and industrious habits were rather in his way than otherwise.

"I shall want you to go down to Birmingham, Pike, this afternoon."

"You couldn't spare me this morning, perhaps?"

"Why?"

"It would suit me better—I might manage to reach home by tomorrow afternoon, then."

"I'm in no hurry."

"But I am, Sir, if you will excuse me."

"Domestic reasons, Pike?"

"Yes, Sir, my Addie—a girl I don't like to leave too long alone, brave as she is. And of course she's always alone, if I'm out."

"May I ask who Addie is?"

"My late sister's child, Sir; my sister and her husband," with a sudden spasmodic gulp, that turned him red in the face, "were drowned at sea, Sir, in the *Culloden*, going to Canada—don't you remember?"

"Something about it—I never let other people's affairs keep on my mind long—it's the worst habit in the world."

"And though it's of no consequence to you, Sir," added Pike, a little disturbed by his employer's coolness, "the child was saved!"

"Pity it had not gone to the bottom along with its parents, and so all to heaven of a bunch! You wouldn't have been hampered with a baby to bring up——"

"Hampered, Sir!" cried Pike.

"Why, how old was the child?"

"I have told you all this before, Mr. Tressider," said Pike, quite shocked at the little impression so sad a story had made upon his principal; "she was six years old, and I was seventeen."

"Good gracious!—and you undertook the charge of that brat instead of passing it over to the parochial authorities! Why, what will be the consequence of all this, Pike? You'll sink the best years of your life taking care of that girl."

"She will repay my care, Sir."

"Yes—with the coin current in this world, and taken as payment by the fools who go out of the way to do a good action—by ingratitude."

"I don't fear, Mr. Tressider."

"You're a man of the world, and ought to know better," said his employer; "there, proceed to business, and be off to Birmingham as soon as you like—the sooner the better!"

"Thank you."

Mr. Pike started shortly afterwards; he was going home for a few minutes, he said, before he left the office to the possession of our hero and Radwick. At three in the afternoon Walter Tressider made his appearance, yawning and stretching his arms right and left as he advanced. Approaching our hero's desk, his handsome face looked over at the work on which Neal was engaged.

"Anything new, Galbraith?"

"A little. Mr. Pike has gone down to the works at Birmingham."

"Why the deuce couldn't I have gone, I wonder?—it's always Pike who drops in for the change. Well, that was a blessed mess of *Othello* last night, thanks to you, young fellow!"

He looked very gravely at Neal. It was not a laughing matter with him yet, that anti-climax.

"Miss Webber was wanted at home."

"By her father, I suppose? Yes, I know what a brute that fellow is; but you need not have squelched the scene by your instructions to the servant. It's a mercy Jennings didn't choke him."

"I was sorry for that blunder—more especially as the play was proceeding so well."

"Did Miss Webber think it was going off well?"

"Yes."

"Thanks to her and me, for the others were horrible sticks. She's clever at histrionics, there's no doubt of that."

"Is she a member of your club?"

"A member under the rose, when she can slip away. It must be hard in a girl of her years to have the reins drawn so tight."

"Have you known her long?"

"Jennings's sister first introduced me to her. Miss Webber's a nice girl—deuced nice!"

Walter Tressider almost spoke with feeling.

"You are engaged to her, perhaps?" Neal asked bluntly.

"Engaged, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Tressider, after a long pause, and a slight change of colour—"I engaged to be married! Bless your soul, I cannot take anybody for better or worse unless there's a fortune to boot!"

"Why not?"

"And as for getting a sixpence out of old Webber—well, I wish he may get it who tries, that's all. I'm not cut out for the holy state, Galbraith, he said, mounting Mr. Pike's stool as more convenient for conversation, and contriving, by tilting the stool towards the wall, and leaning his elbow on the desk, to fall into a full-length pose—"I like my liberty too well—I'm too much of a man of the world, *mon ami*. What could I do with a wife and a hundred and thirty pounds per annum?—make my wife miserable with my very bad way of managing money-matters—kill her and the babies, that would come by dozens, of course, according to established rule in this ill-regulated universe. If I were earning a thousand a-year now, I might think of little Webber; she's capital company, and altogether a good sort—but, as it is, why, Free's the word!"

Walter Tressider, for all this, spoke dismally rather than exult-

ingly; he was in no mood for work that afternoon—last night's dissipation had disturbed the current of his business ideas, and he would do anything but work, or let Neal work. He was *in* for pure unadulterated conversation. He forgave Neal all his last night's trespasses, and even laughed at them after a while, as Miss Webber had laughed the night before.

"Do you know, Galbraith, that I shall make a convert of you?—that I have resolved to win you over to the good cause? I have a very strong idea that acting is your forte—you have such a capital face for the villain of the tragedy!"

"Thank you for the compliment. But I shall never have the time—my father is not strong, and needs a companion."

"A fellow of your age can't be tied up like that. If I had a father, I wouldn't stand it. The governor that will not make his own amusements, should be voted a bore!"

Neal gasped with horror at this irreverent exclamation—he who loved his father so well, could not understand the mind which estimated the parent at so little. And yet Walter Tressider had intended no irreverence—it was his usual careless style of address that had carried him away; he scarcely remembered *his* father, though he had grieved as a child for the loss of him; but he was a heedless fellow, undisturbed by home-thoughts—a man who had never known a real home of his own, and had only heard of nine commandments. Let us add, also, in this place, that he never exactly meant what he said, as future chapters will prove clearly enough. He stands in this book as a specimen of an indifferent article not at all scarce in society, and there is a great deal to be said about the man in future pages.

Letters came in thickly by the afternoon post, and were taken to the principal's room. Just as Neal was going home, Mr. Tressider brought a message into the counting-house.

"Here, one of you two fellows do a little over-work for once, and show your zeal for the house of Tressider. I want this message to be telegraphed to Birmingham from Euston Square."

"For old Pike, I suppose," said Walter, after the principal had retired, taking up the slip of paper and reading it; "just as I supposed. '*Stay till Wednesday. Send instructions by next post.*' That's a nice order; and here am I, who ought to be confidential clerk, and my uncle's right hand, stuck in London in the middle of August!"

"Would business at Birmingham be much of a change?"

"I'd make it change—I like change—I was born for something better than this, *I* know," and the dissatisfied young man gave a kick at his office stool.

"Shall I take that message to Euston Square?" asked Neal.

"It will get there in plenty of time—where's the necessity for hurry?" said Walter; "do you want to take it?"

"I have only one objection—and that is, my father will be anxious about me, and wonder where I am."

"Your father turns up every minute, like a bad sixpence—I never knew such a fellow! Here, I'll go. I *was* off in another direction—"

"Then pass the paper over."

"But my course of action doesn't affect society, and yours does. You have a decided wish, I have only the eighth part of a desire—good-evening," and away dawdled Walter Tressider, swinging the paper in his hand, and evidently making up his mind to lose it as he went along.

"Well, he's not a bad fellow, after all," said Neal; and he bore young Tressider in kindly remembrance from that day.

The next day, which was Saturday, our hero received a telegram in his turn—"From David Pike, Honesty Works, Birmingham, to Neal Galbraith, Esq., Honesty Wharf, Shad Thames."

The message ran as follows: "*Go to No. 14, Crow Street, Bethnal Green Road, and tell Addie that I shall not return till Wednesday.*"

"That's rather cool," said Neal, aggrieved at the peremptory command; "look here, Tressider."

"People don't say please in telegrams—it's expensive courtesy. Fancy working wires hundreds of miles off, in order to say 'please.'"

"But why did he not telegraph to his niece at once?"

"Can't say. Never did understand old Pike. Touched, I fancy."

Neal pondered over Mr. Pike's reasons for some time, and finally arrived at a new conclusion, which, we may add at once, was not far from the truth. Mr. Pike wished the news broken gently to his niece, and had entrusted Neal with that delicate operation.

"He might have picked out one of his own friends," thought Neal; "but I suppose it's complimentary, and that I must not grumble."

Neal started for Bethnal Green Road after office hours; and, to save time, went by a cheap omnibus to Church Street, Shoreditch.

"What a distance for a man to live from office," thought he, as he wended his way towards Bethnal Green, and looked right and left for Crow Street.

He found Crow Street at last, arriving there in somewhat of a bad temper, as the distance impressed itself upon him, and the thought of his father fidgeting about his non-appearance haunted him more and more. He did not always execute commissions as gracefully and generously as last Thursday's, it is evident—and let it be placed on record again that Neal Galbraith had his "dark hours."

At 14, Crow Street, after anathematising three number fourteens which had been found in that identical thoroughfare, and the last of which, of course, was the right one, he knocked forcibly and imperatively. It was a small house, one of a small row of houses,

possessing three windows in front, and flowers in the windows. As he waited he heard a light pattering of feet descending the stairs, and then the door was opened, and a dark-skinned girl of fourteen or fifteen, with hair as black as his own, almost darted into his arms.

"Oh! I thought it was Uncle David back from Birmingham," she said, receding very rapidly. "What do you want?"

"I am a friend of Uncle David's, and have brought a message from him."

"Will you step inside, please?" she asked demurely, "and let me know your business. It's not bad news?" she added, suddenly looking at him with widely-distended eyes.

"No. Only business that will keep him at Birmingham until Wednesday."

"Oh! dear, that's bad news enough, Sir!"

Neal had followed her into the front parlour—a well-furnished room, over-stocked with bookcases and overstocked with books, hampered by aquaria, fern cases, and a huge telescope standing on three legs in the corner of the room. On the table was a well-appointed tea equipage for two and an urn that bubbled and smoked over it like a presiding genius.

"Your uncle telegraphed to me to-day that I was to come here and inform you of his prolonged stay at Birmingham."

Addie sighed.

"Very well, Mr. Galbraith."

"Why, how did you know my name?" exclaimed the surprised Neal.

"I know all about the office," was the reply. "Uncle David tells me everything concerning the business. You cannot be Mr. Tressider, because you are not old enough, or Mr. Tressider's nephew, because he comes here now and then to see my uncle, and I think that you must be Mr. Radwick or Mr. Galbraith, one of the cross-looking clerks."

"Uncle David says that I am cross-looking, then?"

"Stern-looking, that's all — Radwick's the cross one. But — oh! dear, I shall not hear any news till Wednesday now," she said very sadly, "or see my dear old uncle's face. You like my uncle very much, Mr. Galbraith?"

"Well, I have not seen a great deal of him, at present," said Neal, abashed by this question.

"Ah! you have not been at office long—you will presently. Everybody likes my uncle—why shouldn't you?"

She looked quite fiercely at Neal, who answered:

"Ah! why shouldn't I?"

He was standing at the door, anxious to make good his retreat, but the young lady talked so rapidly that the opportunity had not presented itself yet awhile.

"You are in a hurry, perhaps, to get home to your father," said Miss Merton, suddenly.

"Well, I have a father waiting to take tea with me."

"The father who went to law, and then to ruin. My uncle has told me that story," she added, noticing Neal's start.

"He tells you everything, it seems."

"Oh! yes, he tells me everything — why should he have any secrets from me?" said Miss Merton. "And I remember that story because Uncle David was very full of it, year after year. Whenever I caught him at the paper, he was reading Galbraith's case and following Galbraith's case. It made him ill almost; but that was before you came to London. He keeps all the papers about it in that drawer."

She pointed to a drawer with brass handles, appertaining to an old-fashioned bookcase, and Neal looked at it mechanically, wondering meanwhile what it all meant or foreboded.

"I would not say any more, Miss Merton," said Neal, chivalrously, "or your uncle will think that I have been trying to get at his secrets."

"My uncle never had any secrets. He don't like them. Neither do I!"

"Well, you will remember not to sit up for your uncle to-night? —good-evening!"

"Good-evening. I am sorry that you have brought me such bad news, Mr. Galbraith. But I must try and not be dull here till he comes back, lonely as it is without him."

"You alone here!"

"I am uncle's housekeeper—we don't keep a servant or want one, even if we could afford it," she added with the same startling frankness. "I'm rather fond of being by myself in the day-time."

"And too much of a woman to be frightened in the night time," said our hero with a wish to reassure her.

"Frightened indeed! Why, who would hurt me?"

"Nobody."

"Uncle David thinks that I'm old enough to take care of myself —I have the same idea," she added with a pleasant laugh.

"Have you left school?" asked Neal, doubtful of her age.

"I have never been to school. Uncle David is still my school-master every night—but this is my last half. Good-evening again."

"Good-evening."

Neal Galbraith took his departure, and Addie shut the door after him, and drew across it an iron chain for security's sake.

"A queer girl with a queer uncle to take care of her," mused Neal; "one meets with odd people in town."

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. HIGGS GIVES A HINT.

WHEN Mr. Pike returned from business on the Wednesday, he apologised to Neal for the trouble that he had given him.

"She's a girl that bears up well against a disappointment, but I did not like to try her too much with a telegram. She might have fancied that some accident had happened, and—and you did not care about the trouble, I hope?"

"No, Sir," answered Neal, not quite truthfully.

"I don't think we ought to mind helping one another when we can," he said. "I dislike people who are disobliging. What did you think of Addie?"

"Think of her!" repeated Neal; "oh, a very self-possessed girl."

"Old-fashioned?" he said quickly.

"Just a little perhaps for her age."

"You're old-fashioned, you know."

"Oh! am I?"

He thought at once of the observation of that young lady, whom he had not seen for nearly a week now—"old-looking boy!"

"I like old-fashioned young people. I was very old-fashioned myself when I was a boy, and that is the reason, perhaps."

"Yes, but in a girl like yours, it's objectionable."

"Why?"

"Oh!—because—it is," stammered Neal, who had not a reason ready to his lips.

"I don't know that—I hope it is *not*," said Mr. Pike. "I like young women grave and thoughtful and reverent."

"I can't say that I do at present."

"But—there, there, don't lead me into discussion—I'm getting as bad as young Tressider—where's the cash-book?"

There was not much time for discussion; business was really setting in at the Metal Works—goods were coming from Birmingham to town—life and bustle were in the place—even Walter Tressider was compelled to keep to his desk, and not idle time away.

This application to business seemed to exercise an injurious effect on the health of Walter Tressider; he became reserved and low-spirited, and some of the bright colour on his cheeks began to fade. Neal ventured to ask if he were well on the Saturday—a week since his visit to Crow Street.

"Right as ninepence, Galbraith," he answered; "what made you think anything to the contrary?"

"You're not looking first-rate, I fancy."

"It's the hot weather. A fellow ought to be out of town now—a fellow that could afford it, which is not the happy condition of W. T."

On the evening of that day, Neal had his suspicions that it was something more than the business which dispirited Walter Tressider. Towards five o'clock he found that he could not escape the following dialogue between Tressider and Mr. Pike, without leaving his desk.

"I—I can't lend you much, Tressider," said Pike. "I have rent and taxes to pay, and a niece to support. You should have saved money."

"I shall save presently. But, as you see, it's a fix, and if you're the right sort, you'll help me out of it."

"Have you spoken to your uncle?"

"No—nor to the devil, at present. Those two gentlemen are my last resources!"

"Don't speak like that," said Pike, peevishly; "you know I hate such talk. How much do you want?"

"Twenty pounds."

"I can't do it. I wouldn't," said Pike, very firmly, "lend more than I could afford, for anything."

"Well, how much can you afford, old fellow?—say at fifty per cent. interest."

"I don't want any interest; and I can lend you nine pounds, fifteen."

"Look here," said Neal, bluntly, "I don't want to intrude upon your private business, but lower your voices, gentlemen, unless you want me to hear."

"Oh! it's no secret," said Tressider. "I often borrow a pound or two of Pike, and I pay him on quarter-day, like an honest man. I'll borrow of you, when you can afford it, Neal."

"No, you won't," replied Neal, firmly.

"We'll say nine pounds, fifteen," said Walter, languidly; "although it will not do much good. I'll come round to your place in the evening for it—the only place, after all, that has a dash of home in it! What an unlucky scamp I am, Pike!"

"It's your own fault," said the other unsparingly. "You never would take advice—you went your own way to work, and did not think of the result. It's a wonder to me that you have any principle left in you."

"And there *is* a little?"

"Or I wouldn't lend you a penny."

"I should have been senior clerk here, at your salary, if my uncle had been anything like an uncle," grumbled Walter Tressider.

"There, there, keep to your work for one year, and then see how your uncle acts."

"He doesn't mind whether I keep to work or not."

"Don't he?"

"He never says anything."

"Perhaps he thinks the more," said Pike; "and really I would, - he added with greater interest—"I *would* give up that silly stage nonsense, and all those silly stage friends of yours. You're clever and only want energy—you've no will of your own to keep straight, and work upwards—you make me very unhappy, at times. I have told you so before."

"Why should I make you unhappy?" said Walter. "You're no relation of mine, and I've nothing in common with you. I bore you at home, when I have nothing better to do; but I don't even go to your chapel."

"I wish you did."

"And I don't care what becomes of me much—why should you?"

"Walter, there's something more upon your mind."

"It'll stay there if there is."

He dropped off his stool, and sauntered into the private room. Mr. Pike looked after him, and shook his head.

"I can't understand him—I shall never be able to make a man of him, let me try as hard as I will!" he muttered; "he won't be a man!"

Neal thought no more of Walter Tressider's eccentricities for several days. There came to him a new thought, or the revival of an old one, and that took him out of the common track.

The next day but one, on the Monday, he saw Carry Webber again. She arrived at the same moment as Neal came down the street from business, and they both reached Mrs. Higgs's house at once.

Neal raised his hat in the most approved fashion, and Carry gave him one of her brightest smiles, extending her hand at the same time.

"I hope you are well, Miss Webber?"

"Thank you, very well," she said; "is my aunt within?"

"I believe so. I have just returned from office."

"I have been delivering a business message for my father, and have taken my aunt's house *en route*," she said, with great emphasis on her French, as though she was rather proud of it, and it certainly *was* a rarity in Fife Street. "I have been watching an opportunity to thank my aunt and you, oh! so very much, for all your trouble and kindness!"

"Pray don't thank me!" said Neal, blushing. "It was not much to do! I hope the result was perfectly successful?"

"Father thought that I had been idling on my errand—that was all. It was a narrow escape for me," she said, shuddering; "I must sober down now, take this for a warning, and try and like nome better."

She was a different Carry Webber that afternoon—more mild and equable, and certainly more pretty, Neal thought.

Mrs. Higgs opened the door, and found niece and lodger together on the door step.

"Lors!—the two on you! How funny it looks!" she said, somewhat irrelevantly.

"I have been thanking Mr. Galbraith for all the trouble of that Richmond night, and I'm going to thank you now for——"

"All the lies!—ah! well you may. I never thought of swearing black was white, before that day; but your father frightened me, Carry, and I haven't been myself since. Come in."

"I can't stop long—father expects me back in an hour. Good-evening, Mr. Galbraith."

"Good-evening, Miss Webber."

Neal shook hands with her again, and went up stairs to dinner and tea with his father—both meals together, after office hours, and thus a saving of expense. If any one had asked Neal why he hurried through his dinner that day, he would have been scarcely able to assign a reason. He was at home for the evening, and had but his father to attend to, and his father was in no hurry about anything now. Still in half an hour's time he had finished dinner and was sitting at the open window with his father, detailing the business news at "Hopeful's," and keeping a watch upon the door-step below. In the middle of his story, Mr. Galbraith suddenly produced from his pocket a paper which he carefully unfolded.

"Do you remember my idea, Neal, for the current of cold air being introduced into the annealing process?—that patent affair?"

"What of it?" asked Neal, staring at the paper in his father's hands.

"You've locked up all the sketches, and I've been trying to remember the idea, that's all. Is that anything like it?"

Neal took the paper from his father's hand, and scowled at it. Yes, it was very like the idea which might have made his father's fortune, and yet had led them into Fife Street—the plan was carefully, though hastily, struck off, and the details were accurate enough. Neal knew them by heart, though he never alluded to them, and that heart leaped again with joy after gazing at the paper for awhile. His father might have done this a month ago, but he would have been ill—mad—for days afterwards; he saw the evidence of his father's greater strength, and he was glad, though fearful.

"You must not take to this yet," he said; "what did the doctor say?"

"That my head wouldn't stand it—it will now, Neal."

"A little of it, not too much. Half an hour a day—no more. I won't have any more than that, mind."

"Just as you please," said the father submissively; "it's a very little time to think of anything new, that will take us back to in-

dependence. If I could only get stronger and not be such a clog upon you!"

The old man began to whimper softly to himself; Neal passed his arm through his, and led him up stairs.

"You have almost overdone it, old gentleman," he said; "you have been an hour or two at this fun."

"Not more than a couple of hours, boy."

"Then you must go to bed, and sleep off the worry of it. And if I catch you doing it again this week, I'll alter my mind about allowing you half an hour a day for study."

"No, don't say that."

Neal put his father to bed, and returned to the drawing-room. Having exerted a show of authority to keep the weak-minded sire submissive still, he returned to pace up and down the room and soliloquize, forgetting Carry Webber underneath.

"He's sure to get well, God bless him!" cried Neal; "it only wanted time and peace, and he shall have them both. I see it all coming round now; and when the upper hand and stronger mind return to keep *me* down, and show me what a poor, insufficient fellow I am, how happy I shall be! I see the end of it, with a bright home for us, and the life so different—the life in the sunshine! Some one to advise me, instead of me advising and shrivelling up with too much thought. Why, I feel as if I had the cares of all the world upon me, and it's only that simple-hearted gentleman to mind, after all."

A hand fell lightly on the panels of his door, and startled him.

"Learn your part well, Mr. Galbraith," said a merry voice without.

Carry Webber, who had been setting her bonnet straight, and studying the proper arrangement of her ringlets in Mrs. Higgs's room, had, on issuing forth, heard Neal's voice in deep soliloquy. Hence the coquettish action of Miss Webber, and Neal brought to the surface again. Impulse took him down stairs with his hat in his hand, to face Mrs. Higgs and Carry in the passage.

"I'm off for a little walk, Mrs. Higgs—father's tired and gone to bed. I shall not be more than half an hour. You are not going my way, Miss Webber?"

"Not very far your way, Mr. Galbraith;" and then the two went up the street together, and Mrs. Higgs looked anxiously after them.

Neal walked by the side of Miss Webber quite boldly—indeed, when he thought of it afterwards in his own room, he was astonished at his boldness! Possibly he had more confidence than usually falls to the lot of a young man not twenty years of age; but then he had lived and acted a man's part before he had outgrown his youth.

"Mrs. Higgs has forgiven you, I hope?"

"Yes. Aunt is not likely to be very hard upon me, and al-

though I was never her favourite, I am always sure of a friend in her."

"She's a good woman — I like Mrs. Higgs," said Neal, quite patronisingly.

"And she likes you," said Carry; "and as Mrs. Higgs is a good judge of human nature, you should consider yourself flattered."

"So I do."

"She tells me you are so steady, matter-of-fact, and kind to your father, that I begin to fancy she wants me to imitate your style. Do you give lessons?"

Neal might have resented this satire from any one else—from Carry Webber it was a pleasant friendly sauciness, that made his heart thrill.

"I'll give you as many lessons as you like," he added, "free of all expense, and with thanks into the bargain for the pupil's attention."

"How very kind! I wish I had the time."

"Or inclination!—eh, Miss Webber?"

"Were I sure that I could profit by your lessons, I should have the inclination," she answered, turning from jest into sober interest.

"I would give all I have in the world—that's not much—to love my parents, and believe in their love for me! I can only learn to sober down now. I have run wild a little, and been false a little, but I shall grow staid and better, *perhaps*."

"Perhaps!"

"I can't be eternally crossed," she answered; "and I am not a good temper, or truthful, or anything that makes people loved. But then," she added, scornfully, "see how I was brought up!"

"I could not teach you how to be good-tempered," said Neal, striving hard to drift into the lighter channel of conversation again, "for they tell me that I have a very bad temper myself."

"Fond of your own way—I dare say you are. So am I."

She laughed again—the shadows stole away from her face, and a golden light replaced them. This *was* a beautiful evening, thought Neal! He took no heed of time, distance, or locality; he could have walked on for ever talking to Carry Webber; she was a pretty, attractive girl enough, and he was impressionable, and not twenty years of age. All girls should be heroines, and life be dreamland with such youths as Neal. If it had not been dreamland until then with him, he verged upon it that summer evening, and his temples throbbed, and his heart fluttered with a sense of something that defied analysis.

"I'll bid you good-night here," said Carry at last.

"So soon?"

"Why you have come almost to the door with me, and what you want down all these back streets, I don't know."

"Which is your house?" asked Neal.

"Over there. Isn't my name large enough in black and chrome to see?"

"Where does that street lead, Miss Webber?"

"To the Borough Road——"

"And that to the right?"

"The Causeway, and the Borough."

"It strikes me that this must be a near cut to business. I'll try it."

"Mr. Tressider is still at business with you?" asked Carry carelessly—"my Moor of Venice, whom *you* smothered!"

"Yes. He's not very well—I can't make him out just now. He's generally in very good spirits."

"His spirits are not to be relied upon."

"Don't you like him?"

"I hate him! Good-night."

And very hastily Carry bade our hero adieu, and tripped across the road.

Neal walked slowly back from Shepherd Street, a little perplexed at this last assertion of Miss Webber, until the reminiscences of their prior conversation chased the perplexity away. Then he strode briskly forwards with his brisker thoughts, and was soon in Fife Street once more.

Mrs. Higgs was on the watch for him.

"How far did you go with Carry?" asked she.

"Oh! a little way."

"I saw you cross the road—she grows prettier every day, more's the pity."

"Pity, Mrs. Higgs?—good Heaven!"

Mrs. Higgs stood with her back to Neal, snuffing her one candle at the table; Neal lingered at the door, anxious to hear a little more concerning Miss Webber.

"I like to see people grow good and 'siderate, and not think so much about theirselves. She's a kind gal when the fit's on her—there's many wus—and she means no harm when she's taken flighty like, as she was that Richmond night—oh! the horrid lies I told her father!—but she isn't the gal exactly that I'd like any young feller that I 'ticularly 'teemed to take a fancy to!"

She swung round suddenly, snuffers in hand, and faced our hero with her sharp grey eyes. Neal felt that he was colouring, though he had not taken a fancy to any one. Not he, indeed!—he had something better to think about!

"Good-night, Mrs. Higgs," he blurted forth, beating a retreat, two steps at a time, to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XII.

NEAL'S BIRTHDAY.

He, Neal Galbraith, take a fancy to Carry Webber! Was it likely?—was it politic in a youth of his age, with the world before him, a father to manage, and eighty pounds a year? Surely he *had* something better to think about than a girl with an oval face, and brown ringlets shot with gold! And if he had not what a fool he would be to shape a trouble from it all—for only trouble could come of *that* delusion!

Still he went to business Shepherd Street way. It was a near cut to office, time was money, and if the business of Webber, Carriage Breaker, lay in his route, he could not help that, or go round by back-slums to avoid it! He did not walk deliberately into temptation, for he would not acknowledge to himself that there was an attraction for him anywhere—it was pleasant not to acknowledge that, and go on blindly believing in that strength of mind of which he was a little vain. And, at the worst, that strength of mind, he thought, could always level a folly to earth, and leave him free to walk over the ruins. So he went Shepherd Street route to business, and passed Carry Webber's house twice a day, at least.

After a while he was rewarded by a sight of her at the parlour window—at right angles somewhat, for he could never obtain a full view, owing to a dropsical, yellow-bodied carriage, planted in the front garden, in company with a barouche, twenty-four wheels, and the body of a Hansom cab. Almost every morning after a while, at half-past eight, at the parlour window, to return by a smile the courteous elevation of his hat—he had been practising the art of taking his hat off, before the little cracked glass in his bed-room—almost every evening, at half-past five at the upper window, to smile at him again, and send him home delirious with satisfaction. We say almost every evening, for Carry Webber sometimes kept in the shadow of the room, to enjoy his sad stare upwards, and once to laugh at his discomfiture after he had politely saluted, by mistake, the grim visage of the mother, glowering over the parlour-blind at the barouche.

Neal found no chance of further conversation with Caroline Webber for a week or two; once he was grievously disappointed to hear that Carry had been at Fife Street in his absence, and had only just departed—a fact which accounted for her non-appearance at the top window that night. He had made a *détour* to the left for the first time, to purchase some tracing-paper for his father, and he felt that he should hate the sight of tracing-paper for the rest of his life.

For the rest of one of his lives; for he was leading two lives just then; his business one, and that little romantic existence with which business had no connection, and in which he scarcely dreamed he was living himself. It was all right, he felt assured—he knew what he was about—he was a young man, or an “old-looking boy,” wise in his generation.

He kept at his post in that business which had periodical attacks of liveliness, pleasing his master and his senior clerk. He worked well, too well, for his years; he only regretted that there was so little to do at times, and that he could not get rid of his doubts that it was altogether a shabby struggling business. There was little stirring, take the month through, but he should solve the mystery some day.

Meanwhile, the autumn months came round, and he reached the mature age of twenty years. Mr. Galbraith apprised him of the fact, and offered to him another assurance that all was going well with the father.

“Many happy returns of the day, Neal, and God bless you for a good son!” said the old gentleman, coming into Neal’s room to embrace him on that occasion.

“Why, he do look five-and-twenty, at least!—and with whiskers too!—I never saw such a lad to grow old!”

Mrs. Higgs might have said that in the latter days with equal propriety.

That was a memorable birthday for Neal Galbraith. He met Carry Webber again at her aunt’s house when his father and he had condescended to take tea with Mrs. Higgs, in consideration of the importance of the occasion. Could ever anything have happened more lucky in the world for him? thought Neal.

For Carry Webber sat down to have tea with them after a little pressing, and Neal found a chair for her by his side, and all was as it has been in your time and mine, reader—in the merry, merry days, etc. Neal scarcely cared to believe in the reality of his sensations even then; he was conscious that it was pleasant, more than pleasant, to sit by Carry Webber’s side and talk to her and hear her musical voice in reply.

She offered her congratulations like an old friend, too, when informed of the special nature of the feast, and Neal blushed whilst he thanked her, and for a moment pressed that little hand which she had frankly tendered him, when offering her best wishes. It was the first evening he had spent with her—and he found, as he had expected, that she improved rapidly upon acquaintance. She was very charming that night, to the heated imagination of a boy of twenty, and she knew how to be charming when it pleased her! Neal could not realise her petulance on that afternoon, in the same parlour, when he had gone down stairs to console her, or her wilfulness—he would not say slyness—that had characterised the Richmond night,

and made him just a little doubtful of her disposition. Those days might lie years back for what he knew to the contrary—she was a girl then, now she was a sober woman!

Neal never knew how that evening passed, but it was time for Carry to return home, before he thought the tea-things had been cleared away more than five minutes. The days “draw in” at the end of October; the night had fallen long since, and the gas-lights had been glimmering in Fife Street for two hours, when Carry rose to go.

Neal suggested that he would escort her to her father's house—that it was very late for a young lady to go home alone; and what could Mrs. Higgs say to all this, but that Neal, being a gentleman born, knew best what was genteel and becoming. But she shook her head after the young couple had gone—and took another opportunity of retiring into the passage to shake it unperceived by the old gentleman.

Meanwhile, Neal was Carry's escort home, and Carry's hand was on his arm. Fife Street and the back “slums” leading to Shepherd Street were strewn with roses that night—a path that led Paradise way, Neal felt assured—and yet there was no “love-talk” between them. Neal had not the courage to talk sentiment, even if he had been impressed with the belief of “a chance” for him. He verged once on the romantic, when she asked him, perhaps a little archly, if he found Shepherd Street a quicker route to business.

“A very pleasant route when the sun shines, Miss Webber,” he said.

“But when it rains?” was the innocent answer.

“The sun seems to shine even when it rains in Shepherd Street!”

And then Carry was silent, thinking perhaps that Master Neal might go a little too far with his compliments.

Neal had done his best, however, and of his own free will he changed the conversation.

“Have you seen your friend, Miss Jennings, lately?”

“Oh! no; I never expect to see her any more.”

“How is that?”

“The Jenningses are not in my station of life—although Emily and I were schoolfellows together—they keep a carriage, and my father gets a living by breaking carriages and selling the bits.”

“I thought that you were a great friend of Miss Jennings.”

“I have no great friends—I'm not allowed any,—because it leads to company keeping and extravagance. But Emily never was a great friend of mine—she thought that I should be useful at her private theatricals, because she knew that I had a little talent that way, and that there was no one to play *Desdemona* who would not have murdered the part. So I came in handy, Mr. Galbraith.”

"What a shame! and you risked your father's displeasure to oblige that girl!"

"No—to please myself and show off! I'm fond of showing off at times, and it was quite like a story-book to do all this so quietly, and nobody ever the wiser."

"Your father was nearly the wiser for it."

"Very nearly. What fun it was!—what a race home—I often think of it."

"Ah! so do I!"

And then they were close upon Miss Webber's house, and Neal could have wished that fifty miles had lain between it and Fife Street. But the events of that night were not yet over—we have said that it was a memorable night for Neal Galbraith.

In Shepherd Street, Walter Tressider met them face to face. Both started to see this man, haggard and pale as neither perhaps had seen him yet.

"Hollo! Galbraith, I did not expect to meet you!" he said, somewhat rudely; then turning to his companion, "Miss Webber, I have been waiting here these last two hours, to say a few words before I go away."

"Go away!—where—what do you mean?"

"I'll explain in a very few words—Mr. Galbraith will bid you good-night now."

"Good-night, Mr. Galbraith—thank you for your escort."

Our hero shook hands, looking somewhat stupidly for a hero, from one to the other, then raised his hat and beat a retreat. Tressider was after him in an instant.

"Stay here a minute, old fellow!" he said, almost entreatingly; "I have something to say to you, too. Will you wait here for me a little while?—do you mind?"

"No—I don't mind," said Neal, halting abruptly against a lamp-post. He was inclined to feel aggrieved now, and he answered somewhat sulkily.

Walter Tressider hurried back to Miss Webber. She was standing under the next lamp-post, a companion figure of isolation, till Tressider joined her. Neal had not the courage to turn his back upon them; he wanted to observe matters, and if they had wished him not to see them, they would have gone round the corner of the next street out of visual range. So Neal stood with his arms folded, glowering at the couple from beneath the rim of his hat. It was an animated conversation between them; Tressider was evidently energetic. Neal could see his arms rising and then falling to his side, and Carry's face betrayed some emotion in the full light of the gas-lamp above it—more than emotion, for she drew her handkerchief from her pocket at last, and wiped her eyes. They had evidently forgotten him, or they would have gone round the corner, and not have wrung his heart so; he turned his back upon them, and waited

patiently Walter Tressider's pleasure—he had had the feelings of a gentleman, and he felt now uncommonly like a spy.

Five minutes, ten minutes, there—Walter Tressider must have forgotten him and gone away! He looked round for an instant; no, they were still talking there, earnestly, perhaps, but without gesticulation. Right about face once more, and pondering in his mind the advisability of going home, when Tressider joined him.

"I have kept you waiting a precious time, Galbraith," he said in a very hoarse voice.

"Oh!—are you ready?"

They went on together in silence, Tressider not inclined to commence the conversation, Neal resolved not.

Tressider spoke at last, and in a less husky tone.

"I often think that 'To be, or not to be,' of *Hamlet*, the grandest soliloquy in all the languages of the world; but I never thought to realise *Hamlet's* condition of mind."

"You! I should think not."

"Upon my soul, if it were not for the 'afterwards,' I should not flinch at the bare bodkin!"

"Oh! yes, you would, when you came to the practical point of it," said Neal, now wondrously matter-of-fact and satirical.

"If that's a joke, Galbraith, it's particularly unseasonable," said Tressider in an offended tone.

"What's the matter? What do you want with me?"

"To bid you good-bye, old fellow! I have had a row with my uncle, and I'm off to the provinces, to try the stage ranting dodge in real earnest."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"The fact is, Galbraith, I must make a bolt of it. My creditors will not stand any more nonsense, and are determined to lock me up in default of cash payments. I have been a little extravagant—I can't pay them—and I decline, under any consideration, to be locked up. I have made a clean breast of it to my uncle, and he will not help me, or he can't help me—for it's my belief that he's as poor as a church mouse."

"You think so!—why so do I!" cried Neal.

"Perhaps he can't tell himself, till he winds up his accounts—it's more than likely—at all events he will not put himself out of the way to help me, and for the matter of that, I never expected him. So I am off to-morrow, Galbraith, to try my fortune in another field, and live or die in the venture."

"You seem inclined to die beforehand," said Neal.

"Well, I'm horribly miserable—I haven't much hope. I do not know that I ever fancied that I should make a great name on the stage—stage struck as I have been. I understand the uphill nature of my profession, and I don't regard the future cheerfully."

"What does Miss Webber think?" tartly inquired Neal, as they crossed the St. George's Road into Fife Street.

"Oh! Miss Webber!" he paused a moment before he went on; "why, she thinks it's better to run than to be locked up. And she is one of the few friends I care to say good-bye to. I have been to Pike, and I was coming on to Fife Street after you."

"I'm very glad you did not!" said the alarmed Neal; "the announcement of your name might have been the death of my father!"

"Why?"

"We need not explain that matter just now," said Neal. "Let me repeat the question that I put to you once before. Are you engaged to Miss Webber?"

"No," he said very slowly and distinctly; "I—am not!"

"You are attached to her? What is the motive for being ashamed of it? If such a girl loved me, I should be proud of her affection."

"We are only friends—nothing more. We shall never be more than friends," said Tressider gloomily. "There was a flirtation between us perhaps, during the getting up of 'Othello,' and some little fun about her various ways of eluding her father, and coming to rehearsals in the City. If I had been better off I might have married her; but I cannot entangle her in an engagement with a fellow whose ruin is staring him in the face. No, I cannot do that!"

"That's fair and generous, Tressider."

"So, if you have any intentions in that quarter," he said bitterly, "follow them, for me! I am out of the way, the rival with cloak and rapier to fight you to the death for her smiles! She was a friend—she knew my circumstances—her father is a director of a loan office, amongst other things, and breaks up fair prospects with his weight of interest, as well as old carriages with his hammer. I believe they don't use hammers in his trade," he added with a short laugh; "but it was a neat comparison. So, as a friend, who knew my affairs and was sorry for them, I went to bid her good-bye. She's not tied to me in any way—not likely!"

Neal felt relieved by this open confession; this man was simply, and very naturally, an admirer of Miss Webber—not a lover.

"And now," said Tressider, as they walked down Fife Street, "confession for confession—question for question, Galbraith. Are *you* attached to Miss Webber?"

"I am twenty years of age, and with eighty pounds a year salary," was the terse answer.

"Eighty pounds clear of all incumbrances; I wish that was my luck. Do you consider that a sufficient answer to my question?"

"Well," said Neal more firmly, "I'm in that state of mind that makes Miss Webber's company very pleasant to me; and if I were

older and had more money, and thought that there *was* a chance, I would ask her to be my wife."

"She's a good girl, but she's being spoiled at home," said he moodily; "and perhaps she had better wed eighty pounds a year, and live almost in poverty for a year or two, than be worried to death by those two devils in Shepherd Street!"

"I would never ask a girl to take me and poverty together," said Neal, proudly.

"Ah! and she mightn't care for poverty with *you*, hard as her life is!" was the somewhat uncomplimentary reply. "She's too young to marry and I don't suppose she cares more for you than for—me, or anyone else. And this is woefully away from the purpose, Galbraith."

They reached the blank wall at the end of the street, and turned and retraced their steps.

"That is my house," said Neal, as they passed it; "if you feel inclined to step in, I must give you a false name to begin with."

"My false name begins in the provinces, not before; and I haven't much time to spare for further talk with you. I wonder why I have been so unlucky?—I'm not a bad fellow!"

"No," said Neal, feeling more sympathetic, now he felt assured that his companion was not "attached" to anyone!

"I have made a few debts, and they have doubled themselves by the cursed laws of the loan offices. I would have done my best, if I had had a chance—and yet, lacking a fair chance, I haven't done my worst!"

"That's well."

"I have made no man my enemy, and I believe that I have a friend or two. I have never committed a bad action, or wronged man or woman. If I ever get rich, my first step will be to come back here, and pay every farthing that I owe. Old Pike's nine pounds fifteen, first, because he was a trump, and knew how deep I was in the mud! How they'll worry him about my whereabouts!—those amiable, rapacious creditors!—and I shall be beyond their grip, working my way upwards—or downwards!"

Galbraith could sympathise now with his fellow-clerk, cutting himself adrift from old ties, and going away upon an uncertain and fallacious project. Neal was an observer, and noted the recklessness with which Tressider set out, buoyed by no future hopes, and strengthened by no past success. Behind him nothing but failure and dead leaves!—before him the steep ascent, where so many more clever than he had broken their hearts in the effort to ascend—failing, seven-eighths of them.

"You'll wish me luck, Galbraith?" he said when they stood at the corner of the street.

"With all my heart."

"There's one thing I shake hands with myself concerning."

"I don't understand."

"I am thankful that you and I were never great friends, and that you did not 'take' to me," he explained; "you did not fancy me, and would have none of my temptations. All the better, Neal, for you *might* have copied my failings, and begun to run an account somewhere; and then the accursed grind, grind of the screw—and peace of mind but a mask, which you put on in society. There's a first-rate moral for you!—good-bye."

"Good-bye, Tressider; good luck to you again."

"Amen. And good luck to you Galbraith—a place in the world, and as clever a name as your father's without your father's ill-luck—there, that's all the harm I wish you!"

He wrung Neal's hand in his own, and so they parted.

When they met again, the world had altered with them both, and was to alter still more, changing both of them marvellously. But it is a world of change—only beyond it is Immutability.

END OF BOOK THE FIRST.

BOOK II.

A STRANGE COURTSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

"A HAPPY NEW YEAR!"

MR. WALTER TRESSIDER's place in his uncle's firm was not filled up, another sign of dearth of business, Shad Thames way. And yet there were signs from which to augur differently; one came to our hero on the first of January in the new year, when his services were four months old.

In those four months his father had encountered no relapse, and he had met Carry Webber once or twice, fancying on the first occasion that there was a little difference, a new reserve in her demeanour towards him; and on the second fancying that he must have fancied it before! In all weathers, sunshine or storm, proceeding Shepherd Street way to business, seeing her not so often at the windows, and noting on the "lucky days" that her smiles grew somewhat graver as she grew more womanly and thoughtful. She was eighteen years of age then, a period when feminine flightiness should subside a little.

On that first of January, then, came signs of Mr. Tressider's house not being so unstable as Neal Galbraith had imagined.

"Mr. Tressider wishes to speak to you in his room, Neal," said David Pike, after returning from a conference in that room himself.

Mr. Pike always called our hero by his Christian name now.

"Anything wrong?" asked Neal.

"Go and see," said Pike in reply.

Neal walked to the sanctum of his employer, knocked, and was desired to enter. He found Mr. Tressider smothered in papers and plans, and almost hiding himself behind them, in fact. Neal took the chair indicated, and awaited his employer's pleasure.

"I find that you have been here upwards of four months, doing your work well, considering your youth, inexperience, and want of business habits."

"Considering all these things, Sir," said Neal, quite mournfully.

"And I am inclined to believe that you are not here in the capacity of the Avenger," he added; "if you remember, I had my doubts on that subject when you first applied for a situation here—you might have been reading novels too much, and addled your head in consequence. Even in real life we meet with an Avenger sometimes."

"It is possible, perhaps; I don't know much about Avengers," said Neal carelessly.

"And the Avenger may be of the neuter gender—neither fish, flesh, nor fowl—a run of ill-luck sent by the fates, *par exemple*."

He drummed his long fingers on the table, and looked down, till our hero could see nothing of him but a fringe of iron-grey hair. He remained so long silent, that Neal said,

"Have you any commands for me, Mr. Tressider?"

"Are you in a hurry?" was the dry rejoinder.

"No, Sir," said Neal.

"I was deep in figures when you roused me, and now I shall have to begin the account all over again. I was thinking," he said, speaking very slowly and distinctly, "whether it was worth my while to keep you any longer."

Neal did not answer, although his heart sank somewhat. His footing was not secure in the world yet, "places" might be hard to find—and there was his charge—his father! Mr. Tressider was meditating a still further decrease in his staff, then, and there was to follow his abrupt dismissal, as Radwick and Walter Tressider had been dismissed before him. But he would not betray his emotion, and therein Neal proved himself to possess one heroic quality. He was conscious of the keen eyes peering over the papers heaped on the table, and he sat there very stern and impenetrable, the lad whom we have seen once or twice before in this book.

"And I find," added Mr. Tressider, "that it *is* worth my while, and that you're a very decent specimen—for one of your set! We have been short of hands, you have done my scamp of a nephew's work as well as your own, and I shall save by you—making money out of the son, as I have out of the father!"

"Sir!"

Neal flashed up at this. This was a taunt at his father's ruin—an expression of satisfaction at the manner by which that ruin had been accomplished. To be brought to indigence by a plagiarism was hard, but to submit afterwards to the self-content of the plagiarist, was an insult that burned into the heart.

"Don't lose your temper, Mr. Galbraith," adjured the other; "under any circumstances it's bad policy. Injured innocence loses half its charms when it assumes the airs of a virago; the world has no sympathy with red-faced people! In the right, or the wrong, keep your temper, and you will, in nine cases out of ten, get the better of your adversary. I apologise for bringing your father's name into conversation—it was not gracefully done."

Neal bowed. He accepted the apology of his employer, and waited his further remarks.

"I shall save by you, then," he continued, "and therefore I shall not fill Walter's place. But, saving man as I am, I must make it

worth your while to stop, as well as worth my while to keep you. What increase of salary do you expect?"

"I have not thought of any increase yet awhile, Sir."

"You are doing double duty, or nearly so. Pike grumbles for an increase of wage, and gets it, as usual. Shall we reward your greater modesty by giving you half as much again, considering that you're twice as useful as I ever thought you would be?"

"Thank you, Sir," said Neal, feeling more pleased than he even thought the circumstances warranted, for was he not only indirectly receiving back his father's money?

"We will say one hundred and twenty pounds per annum, until further notice, then. I have been talking with Pike about you, and, young as you are, he considers you worth it; and, to tell you the plain truth—which is another bad habit, if you aim at success, remember!—he grumbled for you as well as for himself, and here's the consequences. Don't let me detain you from business any longer, Mr. Galbraith."

Neal rose to withdraw. He was retiring, when Mr. Tressider said:

"Have you heard from Walter lately?"

"No, Sir."

"He's not fond of writing, and probably it is as well that he should wrap himself in mystery for awhile. It is a lucky thing that his troubles are not mine, and therefore affect me not. Good Gad! if he had been my son, now! Do you miss him?"

"Somewhat, Sir."

"He was a pleasant young fellow enough, beset with one foolish idea, that made business monotonous, and an earnest prosecution thereof hard to attempt. I give him credit for making the attempt, however, and failing; and he gave me credit for being so interested in him, as to sink my substance to pay for his indiscretions. He would have actually bothered me with *his* troubles, if I had not told him that they were an obtrusion, and an annoyance."

"He may succeed in his new venture, Sir. Some one must succeed, even in that profession."

"Did you ever see him perform?"

"No, Sir."

"Ah! I thought not. I remember that I offended him once, when he asked for my candid opinion of his style. I was a terrible play-goer in my young days, and vain of my critical judgment. My nephew persuaded me to see him personate *Romeo*, for a charity, and, by Jove! it was a charity to form an audience to witness his contortions. 'My candid opinion is, Walter, that you're worthy of the A.A. degree,' I said; 'for a more Ambitious Ass I have never seen in my life!' And yet, after asking for my candid opinion, he actually demurred to it, and would have taken offence at it, had he been an ill-tempered man—which he never was; I *will* say that for him."

"We may hear a good report of him yet."

"Not we. He's a spoiled man. His mother spoiled him in his youth, poor fool, by giving him his own way too much. What right have people to spoil their children, and make pests or parasites of them? I never was spoiled!"

Mr. Tressider took up his pen and began writing rapidly; Neal went back to the counting-house, and to Mr. Pike's desk.

"I have to thank you for suggesting to Mr. Tressider an increase in my salary, Mr. Pike."

"Time that you had it—you were doing man's work, Neal," he said; "and I should like to see the Galbraiths rise in the world. What has he given you?"

"Forty pounds more per annum."

"Well, that's not illiberal," said Pike; "and he never was an illiberal man, for that matter. An irreverent, worldly, bitter-tongued man, but not illiberal. You don't respect him much, Neal?"

"N—no," said Neal, after an instant's hesitation; "how can I?"

"You bear him malice in your heart still?—I wouldn't do that," said Pike.

"I bear him no malice," said Neal, more frankly; "he has done harm to me and mine, but I think that he is sorry for it himself. And, it's very odd, that I feel sometimes as if I respected him more than he deserved."

"I am glad to hear that. I respect him, though I do not screen his faults, or mind telling him what they are; but then I was office-boy here thirteen years ago, and have become part of the place. He insults me very much sometimes about my tracts—as if tract-distributing were not one of the finest means of conversion."

"But you don't give Mr. Tressider tracts?"

"Yes, I do. For I should like to see him a better man; and when I drop upon a tract that appears to me exactly applicable to his state, I leave it on his desk."

"And he objects?"

"Oh! he calls me dreadful names," said this simple-minded man; "you can scarcely imagine the cool, insolent manner, which he adopts occasionally. I have been nearly leaving here half-a-dozen times, but I don't know what he would do without me."

This was a naïve conceit, that did not set ill on Mr. Pike, for he was not aware that he was conceited. He had spoken only the plain truth, to which Mr. Tressider had recently objected.

"And I don't care about new places, and new faces—I'm not fond of change. I would rather that you and I worked a little harder here, than have another clerk, now Walter's gone."

"We shall not work very hard to keep matters straight, Mr. Pike."

"You may not, perhaps."

Mr. Pike seemed to decline further conversation after this; and Neal mounted his office stool and went to work for the day. But Neal had scarcely entered a figure in the ledger before him, when Mr. Pike said :

"What did you mean just now?"

"I had no hidden meaning, Sir."

"Don't you think the firm is busy, or thriving?"

"Not very busy, certainly."

"You must take the year round—not four months of it. Wait a bit."

Neal had resolved not to judge hastily, although appearances were against a favourable judgment as to the commercial standing of the "house." Had not Walter Tressider given it as his opinion that "matters" were not exactly straight?—he, Neal Galbraith, was not alone in his suspicion. To Neal already, the firm of Tressider appeared making an effort to stand, fighting hard for contracts that did not always turn out profitable, and doing but little in the wholesale line. Now and then a ship-load of things went abroad, and there was bustle for a day or two; but for weeks there was stagnation; and though Mr. Tressider was ever the same, in stagnant days, Mr. Pike was dull. Add to this, mysterious visitors calling on Mr. Tressider, and being closeted with him for hours, and one or two travellers on commission returning with few orders, and there was certainly fair ground for doubt.

Still Mr. Pike spoke confidently, and Neal was not naturally suspicious. He could believe in the quiet method of making money, and he could not imagine Mr. Tressider increasing the salaries of himself and Pike, if money difficulties were standing in the way. And then the salaries were paid promptly, and Mr. Tressider did not look an anxious man.

"A hundred and twenty pounds a year," said Neal, later in the day—"why, that's quite a man's salary now, Mr. Pike. How comfortable my father and I will be now!"

"He has a small income of his own still?"

"A small one."

"You should buy a house presently, and save paying rent. Pay some money down, and the rest by instalments to a building society."

"And if I lose my place, and am unable to settle the balance?"

"You will never earn less than a hundred and twenty pounds per annum, and will probably earn more. You're clever—your father benefited the metal trade, and the son is always sure of a situation somewhere or other."

"You really think so?"

"I really am sure so, Neal."

Neal could not account for Mr. Pike's expression of confidence, but he believed it nevertheless, and felt happier for the assurance

given him. Sure of one hundred and twenty pounds per annum as a minimum salary—that, with his father's income, made up a hundred and seventy pounds—quite a fortune! A salary upon which many men had to live, and keep large families, and did it, too, without falling into debt. Why not, if they were humble-minded people, who made no display, and were contented with life's necessities? He could marry and live happily on a hundred and twenty pounds a year, he felt assured; and if he only knew the right girl to love, and who would have him, and put up with his father, he would marry to-morrow. Ah! if he only knew the girl who could take a fancy to Neal Galbraith! He knew the girl—he owned it then to himself—to whom *he* could take a fancy, but that was quite another thing.

Strange it seemed to be idling over his account-books, and thinking, at twenty years of age, of marriage, and taking in marriage; but then he was a youth old in thought, and had only met with one maiden pretty enough to bewilder him, and render the life he had begun early less prosaic. And that girl was not happy in her own home, and was treated harshly—why should not he rescue her, if he were fond of her, however young his years might be? There had been early marriages before—very early marriages—and people had laughed at the young fools, and said that they ought to have known better, and that they would repent of their precipitancy; but nothing came of such prophecies, the young fools became old fools in due course, and people forgot their story, and became interested in something more sensational.

But all this was mere day-dreaming—the fancy pictures of a brain a trifle disturbed by a sudden rise in the world; it could come to nothing, and it was the fault of a slack day that had given rise to such maunderings. Still it was pleasant to think that he was in a position to marry, better off than most "young men" of his age, and that Carry Webber stood only apart from him by her own disinclination. And he was not so sure of that, he thought, with a thrilling heart, for she was friendly in her manner, and not sparing of her smiles. He might have been crossed in love by Walter Tressider, and yet he should have had his chance too, for Carry had once told him that she hated Tressider!—a strong term; but then she was an eccentric girl, and did not study fine words.

What a task for him to model her mind anew, and win her heart in that home where love should ever exist for her! Why, surely his father and he were preferable to Mr. and Mrs. Webber—and then all the love into the bargain!

Later in the day still, Neal dashed down his own hopes remorselessly. He had only seen Miss Webber a few times; he had no right to think of her; it was not likely that she would ever think of him. Why, she had called him "an old-looking boy," and that was emphatic evidence of *her* opinion—what nonsense to trouble his

head about all this ! Let him be content with his rise in life, and keep to his father, Mrs. Higgs, and Fife Street, until the world was brighter with him. He went home full of his new thoughts, and even looked up at the carriage-breaker's windows with a woful countenance—more especially as there was no Miss Webber to raise his hat to that evening.

No Miss Webber!—for a reason that was apparent after a while, and before he was a dozen yards from the house. Marching homewards, with his face none the less gloomy for this little disappointment in life, a hand touched his shoulder, somewhat smartly, and even heavily. Neal coloured and stopped, half thinking that it was an unusual instance of high spirits on Miss Webber's part, and yet half doubting that so heavy a fist could possibly appertain to so sylph-like a being. He turned, and confronted a short, wooden-headed, dirty-faced man, who, with his hat firmly wedged upon his head, seemed waiting for a furious gale in Shepherd Street.

"May I inquire your name, Sir? Is it too great a liberty, or will you oblige me?"

The questions were not put too courteously, but jerked out in a gruff voice, that Neal recognised, though he had only heard it once in his life. This was, doubtless, Mr. Webber.

"My name is Galbraith, Sir."

"And *my* name is Webber. And now, what the devil's your little game?"

"My little game, Sir!" said Neal, not ignoring Mr. Webber's slang in that polite and cutting manner with which some people effectually extinguish their slaugy acquaintances; "I haven't a little game."

"Not on here? Before my house, doing the awfully polite, taking your hat off to my daughter! 'Pon my soul, I thought it was to Mrs. Webber at first!"

"I can assure you, Sir, that it was not."

Neal was very polite, blind to the offensive demeanour of his companion, and returning meekness for brusqueness; this gentleman with his hands in his pockets might be his father-in-law some day, and, at all events, unpleasant reminiscences should not be on the side of the junior.

"Well?"

Mr. Webber wanted his answer, and seemed even in rather a hurry for it.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Webber at her aunt's house, once or twice. Passing here on my way to business, I have certainly considered it an act of courtesy to raise my hat to Miss Webber, when accident has placed her at the window."

"You and your father lodge at Mrs. Higgs's?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Then it was you or your father who threw a lump of bread at

me one night. I dare say it was you, if the truth was known—fellows of your age are always impudent enough."

"The bread must have fallen out of window, Sir; neither my father nor I am capable of such rudeness."

"Ah!" said he doubtfully; "now, just hark here! You need not come this way to business any more—there are plenty of streets that'll take you into the Borough without coming our way. I don't want my girl's head turned with your politeness, and it worries Mrs. Webber and me to see you smirking and bobbing about here twice a-day. I thought I'd mention it."

"Oh! very well, Sir—very well. If it gives you offence, of course——"

"Of course you'll do it all the more," he interrupted; "but I may as well tell you that Carry is not likely to be at the window about your time, and you can save yourself the trouble of passing. Don't forget."

And with a knowing nod at Neal, Mr. Webber stumped across the road.

Neal went onwards again, with his ears tingling and his face burning. He had eaten very humble pie—he, a Galbraith, to swallow this man's coarseness, and not send him back one sharp rejoinder for his insolence! He was mortified at the repulse, and made no allowance for a father's feelings; and a father may be justly aggrieved at young men with whom they are not on "speaking terms," bowing and scraping to their daughters. And perhaps Mr. Webber *was* justly aggrieved—knowing little of Neal, and having his own ideas of propriety. Still Neal was none the less mortified—mortified with himself, because he had looked like a fool before Mr. Webber—by George! he was sure that he had stood like one "struck silly" before him!

He forgot all about his rise in salary till supper time, thinking of Mr. Webber and what a nice man he was; then he shook off his sense of disgrace, and offered the good news to his father, who had been watching him somewhat wistfully.

"My dear Neal, I congratulate you. It's a wonderful leap in a salary, and quite out of the common! That makes a hundred and twenty pounds a year, Neal!"

"Yes—it's very good. I knew that you would be pleased, Sir."

"It's—it's rather exciting," said Mr. Galbraith, passing his hand a little vacantly across his forehead; "because, you see, I wasn't prepared for it. But it's better than telling me by bits, and letting the thing drag on for months—a hundred and twenty pounds a-year, Neal!"

"It sounds imposing, Sir!"

"We must tell Mrs. Higgs—and we'll drink Mr. Hopeful's health in our supper beer to-night. Meanwhile, Neal, I want your opinion of another plan of mine—I have been working at it quietly

for weeks—I haven't been a bit excited over it; upon my word, I have left off with a head-piece as clear as yours!"

"Because you left off in good time—why, you wouldn't keep at work longer than an hour a day, and break your promise to me?"

"Not for the world, boy!"

"Let us have a turn at the plan, then."

Mr. Galbraith produced it, and even attempted to explain it, till his son said that he understood it without his explanation, and sat with his thoughtful eyes directed to the diagram. Neal, in younger days, had evinced a certain leaning of the mind towards his father's pursuits, which leaning had been encouraged before the shock came. After the shock, all uphill studies had appeared folly to Neal, whose common sense assured him what was best to follow in emergency. But he understood and appreciated clever ideas, when they were associated with practical working. He was quick enough to see when they were thoroughly impracticable, and when there was a flaw in them. And in his father's latter-day sketches there was always a flaw—a hitch in the machinery, which kept the wheels from revolving. Neal was prudent, and never called attention to these defects; he expressed his satisfaction at his father's plans—always containing more than a glimmering of sense—and then proposed putting them away in the portfolio, till they had capital enough between them to work out the scheme. And once in the portfolio was to shut them for ever from the memory of Galbraith the Inventor.

This new sketch varied but little from its predecessors, and Neal expressed his verdict thereon, and considered that it might be worth thinking about some day or other.

Mrs. Higgs, entering with the supper tray, afforded a diversion, and Neal told her the news, like a free-spoken youth with his heart full. Mrs. Higgs gave vent to her satisfaction, wished Neal every enjoyment with his money, and expressed it as her opinion, that it was a blessing sent to Neal for being a good son.

"Oh! don't tell me that, Mrs. Higgs, or you'll make me think myself better than other people," cried our hero.

"Lors! the sight of news that there's been to gally me to-day, take it in the lump!" said Mrs. Higgs; "here are you going to be a rich man, and there is my niece Carry with a chance of marrying 'pectably—only think!"

"What's that?" asked Neal, with a suspicious sharpness.

"I made a call to-day at Johannah's—I don't like to be always away, as if she wasn't my sister quite—though we seldom agree when we do meet, and yet it's flesh and blood of one sort, you see."

"Yes—yes, I see; and Miss Webber is likely to be married, then?"

"I didn't say that," said Mrs. Higgs; "she can if she likes—there'll be a hoffer in a day or two; and young as she is, I shouldn't

be sorry to see her marry some middle-aged tradesman or other, a man that could hold her pretty tight in hand, without her knowing it."

Mrs. Higgs looked hard at Neal, and spoke with great distinctness, but Neal was on his guard after that.

"And who's the happy man?—shall we drink his health along with Mr. Hopeful's in our supper beer?"

"He's a friend of Mr. Webber, if Webber has any—I never heard of his having any afore—but Johannah calls him a friend, and I think he's a pork-butcher, with a widdered family of nine."

"A pork-butcher? Oh! Heaven! Neal could not help exclaiming; "what next?"

"Johannah thinks it's a good match—he has two shops—one in Lambeth Walk, and one in Pitalfields. What can the trade matter, if he makes her happy, Master Neal?"

Neal on guard again.

"'A man's a man for a' that,'" sang Neal. "To be sure, 'what's the odds?' as you elegantly express it."

"I never said nothing about odds," affirmed Mrs. Higgs.

"I beg your pardon—I was thinking of a wise old aphorism."

"What's any im got to do with Carry?"

"Nothing. Carry'll be happy with the pork-butcher, and help to stuff the sausages, and we'll deal with her lord and husband, and so increase the connection. Miss Webber will be very much obliged to us, I'm sure. Supper, father."

"What's—what's the matter, Neal?" asked the old gentleman, drawing his chair and himself by little jerks to the table; "*is* anything fresh the matter?"

Neal coloured at this leading question. Why, what a bad actor he must be, and how badly must he have assumed the indifferent vein, to arouse even his father's suspicions at his ill-timed irony.

"Nothing's the matter. Beer, Mrs. Higgs, please—father, crust or crumb?"

Mrs. Higgs departed, looking askance at Neal till the last, much to Neal's suppressed vexation; and then supper was commenced, Neal breaking off abruptly after the first attempt to enjoy his bread and cheese, and pushing his plate away.

"No appetite?" asked his father, with concern; "then something *is* the matter?"

"My good luck has taken my appetite away till to-morrow morning. And we are forgetting that health, after all!"

Having created a divergence from a dangerous topic, Neal led his father to discourse of the day's incidents; submerging himself in thoughts of his own, but contriving, nevertheless, to answer very cleverly and readily when answers were required.

Carry Webber besieged by a pork-butcher!—what a drop from the land of romance to realism! What would Carry think of her

new lover?—and how would she consider his offer?—and in what manner would it be received, backed by such a father as he had encountered that evening? He felt very miserable—the day had been *too* full of incident for him, and he should be glad to be shut in his own room, and reflect upon it all. He was in love with Carry Webber!—why should he attempt to disguise that fact any longer—there was nothing to be ashamed of in the avowal; and she was very pretty, clever, and amiable. It might be the first young woman whom he had ever met—but he should never like another! Where he first loved, he should love always—oh! his head! how it ached!—oh! that pork-butcher!

He looked at his father wistfully. If he could have told him all!—he wanted no secrets from *him*; but he feared the revelation, and the perplexity it might create in a mind far from strong yet. He could seek no advice—he must act for himself, as he had acted since he was a boy, and might be compelled to act throughout his life. Only this morning he felt light and happy—and now a few words had rendered him utterly wretched, not alone for himself, he thought, but for the girl who had crossed his path so strangely. Then he thought of the times that they had seen each other, Carry and he, and how frequently she had appeared at the windows of her house—too frequently for chance to have anything to do with it! She must have thought of him—she could not have objected to his smiles, for she had smiled back in return at him. She—*what was that?*!

It was a rapid knocking at the street door below, and he thought of Carry on the instant. She had run away from Shepherd Street, and the pork-butcher, to seek comfort from her aunt—he was sure of it!

He strode across the room, and flung up the window, letting in the cold night air of the new year. Yes, he was right; it was Carry Webber in Fife Street, that was certain!

“My—my dear Neal!” exclaimed the father, with his teeth chattering, “you’ll give me my death of cold!”

“All right!—only a minute!” said Neal, in reply.

The noise of the opening window above her head caused Miss Webber to look up. His heart quite leaped again at the cheerful, musical voice below him.

“Good-evening, Mr. Galbraith—a happy new year to you!”

“And to you, Miss Webber,” he called back. “May I come down, and wish you that?”

“Not to-night. I am not going to stop a minute!”

“Please!” adjured Neal.

“In five minutes, then,” answered Miss Inconsistency; “if——”

“Come in, child, and don’t talk in the streets like that. Didn’t you ever learn better manners?” cried her aunt.

“Oh! yes—once!” was Carry’s answer.

“What do you want? Why, what’s that?”

"This is a basket, and that's a beer-jug. I'm maid-of-all-work in Shepherd Street—didn't you know that?"

"Come in—come in!"

The door closed, simultaneously with the descent of the drawing-room window. Neal returned to his seat, and found his father with his great-coat on.

"It's—it's horribly cold!—whatever made you let the frost in?"

"To wish Miss Webber a happy new year."

"Ve-ve-very kind of you, Neal; but you have nearly frozen my marrow. I shall never get warm any more!"

"Sit by the fire."

"No; I'll go to bed, I think."

Neal offered no objection to his father's suggestion; even escorted his father up stairs, and tucked him in for the night as usual. All this in five minutes, and then down stairs cautiously, like a thief; and going out of the front door on tiptoe, when charged at by Mrs. Higgs.

"Who's that?"

"It is I, Mrs. Higgs," said Neal. "I shall be back in a minute."

"Hum!—I dare say you will."

Neal went on to the corner of Fife Street, and took up his post under the street-lamp. He would wish Miss Webber a happy new year there—he would even find courage to ask about that pork-butcher—to ask even if she had the courage and patience to wait for another man instead.

Yes, he would chance it. Why should he not?—he loved Carry Webber, and he thought that he should have the bravery to tell her so—he was sure that he should! And she could but say "No," and put him out of his misery, and leave him to live her down—oh! yes, an end to all this in a straightforward fashion!

He waited ten minutes in the frost, becoming conscious at last that he had come out in his shooting-jacket; then he heard the door of No. Fifteen close, and beheld the figure of her, for whom he was watching, advancing towards him—fitting along rapidly and lightly.

"Now for it!" said Neal, between his closed lips; "I shall know the best or the worst in a minute!"

CHAPTER II.

NEAL MAKES AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

"A HAPPY new year to you once more, Miss Webber."

"Is that you? How you startled me!"

Which was scarcely a fact, seeing that Miss Webber had anticipated this rencontre; but then young ladies must say something to appear unconcerned and quite at ease under similar circumstances.

"I thought that I would wish you a happy new year out here, for the reason that I have something to tell you about your father, in the first place," said Neal, "and because it's an excuse to escort you to Shepherd Street, in the second."

Neal fought very hard for self-possession—he wished his proposal to come with a shock, if possible, which was an unfeeling desire of his, and but questionable policy.

"I don't think that I shall allow of your escort, Sir," said she, with a defiant little toss of the head.

"Just for once," pleaded Neal; "I have not seen you for so long—I have so much to say!"

They crossed the road together. On the other side of the way he offered her his arm, and she laughingly refused it, holding up a wicker-basket with one hand, and a stone jug and door-key with the other.

"Weary and heavy-laden, Mr. Galbraith," said she; "we do not keep a servant in our establishment—mother and I work industriously morning, noon and night—I'm to be brought up with befitting humility."

"But they don't really make a drudge of you?"

"Not so great a drudge as you might expect; for my mother does the drudgery, against my will, and on purpose to aggravate everybody, I think—perhaps, after all, to spare me, and my pride, though she will not own it. I never understood my mother—I never understood anybody—I am of slow perceptions."

"I'll not believe *that*!"

"Or I have met with very out-of-the-way people—but I am not discontented. I am settling down now, content with everything!"

"I hope not!"

"You!—what's it to do with you?" she said, with her half-mocking, half-laughing face turned to him.

"I'll tell you in a minute, perhaps," he said; "will you take my arm?"

"No, I can't!"

"Here, give me the basket and jug—pass them over!"

"No!" said she petulantly; "let them be under my shawl, and proceed with your revelations—what about my father?"

"I met him to-day."

"I know that—he told me so," she answered hurriedly; "is that all?"

"He told you that he objected to my passing your house, or looking towards it; as if I could help that, Miss Webber?"

"Perhaps you had better go some other way to business," she said demurely.

"No—I'm hanged if I——"

"You do not want to expose me to fresh taunts?—to further protests against my general behaviour?"

"Not for the world!"

"Then keep away from Shepherd Street. It can't afford you any pleasure to see me, and—I'm sure it don't afford me any pleasure to see you."

To have understood the effect of these words, one must have been proceeding towards Shepherd Street with this young couple. Printed in bourgeois type on this page, it reads like an insult, cool as the January night on which the dialogue took place; but it did not sound like one—for there was the old pleasant sauciness in the voice, and Carry Webber's spirits were high that evening.

"Possibly not, on your side," said Neal, whose heart beat faster at this badinage; "but on mine—how do you know?"

"I do not know, of course; but I cannot see why it should."

"Why should you, when you are engaged to be married?"

"What?"

Neal had not been sworn to secrecy, and he went on.

"You are engaged, or about to be engaged, to a—a pork butcher, a man with two shops, and nine children!"

"Aunt Higgs told you that?"

"Yes. It's no secret, I presume?"

"My mother told Aunt Higgs to-day—my father told my mother yesterday—the pork-butcher gave an idea of the state of his feelings on Sunday morning last to father. Those are the separate links of the chain—what do you think of them?"

"What do *you*?"

"I'll tell you afterwards if we are not at Shepherd Street by that time."

"I think, perhaps, that I ought—to offer you—my congratulations. That is if it's really likely to come to anything?"

"Congratulate me, then, on my change of life, will you?"

She looked imperiously at our hero, who felt withering up beneath her glances.

"No, I—I can't! I should be sorry to think that it was all true."

"Is it not a temptation to get free? The widower is only forty-two, and is a weak-headed simpleton, who would let me have my own way, and do all in his power to make me happy—and I am unhappy at home, where no one loves me! Besides, why should I be too proud for a shop?—what is there in *me*?"

"Still—you won't have him, Miss Webber?"

"No. I won't have him, because I am too proud, or he's too old, or I am too capricious. I'm young enough to wait—I'm in no hurry—I have grown used to my home, and they cannot be more hard upon me for refusing him than they are now. I knew that they were set upon this scheme, and I have run over to Fife Street to-night to hear what my aunt has learned about it. I find that my father's hints have not been thrown out wildly."

"This does not seem to have distressed you, Miss Webber?"

"I have been pleased at it all. It is novelty, and dissipates the monotony of home; besides, it flatters one's pride to have even won the affections of a pork-butcher. What could he find in me but a sullen, vain, disagreeable girl?—to be always seen at her worst in Shepherd Street!"

"He saw you—that was enough!"

"Oh! was it?"

"It has been enough for me!" said Neal.

Carry Webber began to walk on at a great pace. She did not respond to his last remark, which tore aside the flimsy veil that had hung between them both. Neal had broken through the ice; after all, he was a bold lover, and shrank not from the avowal. She seemed vanishing away from him; his heart was young; this was his first love, his first romance, and he made one plunge after the ideal, and risked all, knowing so little!

"It has been enough for me," he repeated, laying his hand upon her arm; "to see you has been to love you, Carry. Don't turn away your head, or run away from me; just listen! I do love you very dearly; I want you to love me, to wait for me, and become my wife; to teach me how to deserve you by my patience, and my deep affection."

"Don't say any more!" she murmured; and Neal, looking into her face, saw that she was crying.

"Yes, I'll say all now, and have your answer. I have been in suspense, thinking of you so much, and wondering if you ever thought of me. And I'm two years older than you are, and able to take care of you, protect you, and make you happy, if you will only try to give me love for love! Ours would be so happy a life, so contented a home, and I should rescue you from those who do not value you as you deserve. I understand you—they don't. Come to my side, Carry, and leave them. I love you with all my heart, I tell you!"

She slid her arm away from his hand, and hastened on. The

jug fell and split into fifty pieces against the kerb stone, but created no diversion; suitor and maiden had forgotten the common things—the common accidents of life. Neal only knew that he could snatch at her hand now, and draw it through his arm; that she let it rest there, struggling no more, and heard again the story of his love, shaken by its earnestness, and still shedding tears for it.

She became calm at last.

“And you know so little of me! And yet you could put up with my bad temper, my odd ways, better than they could—you would make allowances for me, and not scold me, more of a child, perhaps, than you think, Neal. Oh! I should have been a good woman—I know I should—if I had been differently brought up!”

“You are all that is good, Carry—I am sure of it,” cried Neal; “I would not have you different in anything for all the world.”

“Then I’ll love you, Neal, and be ever, ever true to you—there!”

“God bless you, Carry!—this is real happiness.”

They were in the darkest part of the street; it could not have happened better for “the proprieties;” most of the shops were closed; the frost had kept in doors all wanderers but one there, and he was standing with his back to them, trying to obtain a light to his pipe in a shady doorway. They had the street to themselves, and Neal put his arm round her waist, and drew her closer to him, stooping his face down to hers, which shrank but very little away from his impassioned kiss.

It was all over in a minute, and when the man with his pipe comfortably lighted came out of the doorway towards them, he saw but a young man and woman arm in arm, the young woman’s bonnet a little flattened in front. Still he stopped after he had passed, and looked after them, shading his eyes with his hand, and bending a little forwards.

“That looks like Carry,” he muttered to himself; “I might have watched till doomsday!”

The lovers went on together, with their hearts too full to take heed of people by the way. They had still much to say to each other before they parted, and Carry was anxious to speak first.

“And you must never tire of me, Neal—or think that you might have done better, some day, than marry a wilful sly girl like me.”

“Is it likely?”

“And—and there’s Mr. Tressider. I shouldn’t like you not to know about him and me.”

“He has told me all—I see nothing in it. It was a flirtation, thank goodness, that never came to anything; I’m not likely to be jealous about that.”

“I am so glad!”

“We can’t waste the time talking of Mr. Tressider just now,”

said Neal; "let us think of all this, and what we shall do. In the first place, I shall call on your father."

"Oh!" ejaculated Carry.

"He shall not say that I acted dishonourably towards him. I'll tell him that we both love each other—that I have a salary of a hundred and twenty pounds a-year, and can keep you upon it—that I'll wait, if he particularly wishes it, till I'm one and twenty, although I see no reason why we should not be married next week."

"Go on, Neal, and don't talk such nonsense as that!"

"I'll lay everything plainly before him, and ask for his consent."

"He'll never give it, I'm afraid."

"I don't see why he should not. He will think of your happiness, when it comes to the grand question, I'm sure. He's a little abrupt, but he means well, Carry."

"We'll hope for the best—but if the worst comes?"

"We must resist it, and be true to each other, watching our opportunity, and biding our time."

She pressed his arm with her hand.

"You may tire of opposition."

"Not I. But you, who are weaker—younger?"

"I have been used to opposition all my life, Neal—they cannot tire me out."

"Then we shall be happy—we must be happy, Carry! What is to hinder us?"

"Nothing, I hope."

"Now let me tell you of my father—he will not be so bad as nine children to manage—and you will have him love you as his daughter, for he is so gentle-hearted and affectionate a man."

"Like his son, Neal?" said she, archly.

Neal was obliged to kiss her again for that; in his intoxication he was becoming reckless of consequences, and he did not look round to see if any one were about or not. *He* was in a world of his own then!

"There, Neal, I must run away, and get my usual scolding, bearing it with more equanimity than ever. Good-night."

"Not yet—I haven't told you about my father—all I want to tell you concerning him."

"But it's so late, Neal."

"Five minutes more, dearest," and they turned their backs upon Shepherd Street, and sauntered away from the parental roof again. Then Neal told her of his father's life, misfortunes, and mental weakness, and asked her if she could bear with that father for the husband's sake, in the good time ahead for both of them.

"I am proud of the old gentleman—very careful of him—with-out me he would die. With you to be his daughter in my absence,

he would be happier, and I want you to learn to love him for his own sake as well as mine."

Carry was a sensible girl, young as she was. She answered readily and frankly.

"I shall love him, Neal, but I do not think that he will add to my happiness, living with us, and not understanding the wilful girl whom his son has taken to wife. Old people never understand young ones, and they will love each other better at a little distance apart."

"But he is weak—he is very different from most old men—a child can lead him."

"Neal, if you wish it, I will not say No. Perhaps," with a little shudder, "I cannot understand what a loving father is. If I am happy with him, why, that's enough. And Neal Galbraith will always like his own way, I can see."

"When it does not clash with the will and the way of this dear, impudent sweetheart of mine."

"There, let me go, Neal, now. It is very late. Good-night."

"Good-night, then," said he, "and to-morrow to state my intentions, and cut out the pork-butcher, Carry!"

"Yes, yes—let me go. God bless you!—good-night."

Then she darted away from him and his proffered caress, and ran home to Shepherd Street, arriving there flushed and breathless. She opened the door with the key, shut the door after her, and went into the passage and parlour, to find the gas out and the parents nowhere.

She lighted a candle with some difficulty, and looked at the untasted supper and the empty chairs, realising the facts of the case very speedily. Mr. and Mrs. Webber had taken offence at her delay, her non-appearance with the supper-beer, and retired to rest, leaving her to isolation. Carry locked up the house and followed them, glad of the slight that had been put upon her, and recking not of the black looks in store for her next day. She was glad to be alone, to meet with no vexatious questions that night, to be enabled to steal up to her room, and lock herself in with all the new bewildering thoughts that had dashed at her to alter her life. She fastened her door, flung bonnet and shawl away from her impetuously, then dropped into a chair, leaned her elbows on the dressing-table, and clutched her dimpled chin with both hands. It was a lovely face in the looking-glass before her, but she did not look towards it, which was strange for Carry, bewildered though she was. For a while she forgot it, and sat thinking and looking downwards, passing in review the incidents of that night, and of more than that night, till the head drooped, and sought shelter in the folded arms, where it rested till heavy convulsive sobs began to echo strangely in that room.

She shook herself away from grief by sitting up and dashing

away the tears with both hands wildly. She flung back from her face her disordered golden hair, and looked into the glass at last, addressing excitedly her second self there.

"He is too good for me; why should I fear the happiness he offers me—me who have never been happy yet? I will try to love him with all my heart—oh! how I will try for both our sakes, forgetting *everything*!"



CHAPTER III.

BARRIERS IN THE WAY.

NEAL went homewards rejoicing. There were no misty by-gones for him—far away echoes from a past where hopes had been different—the bloom was on the fruit of the Hesperides, and the choicest prize was in his grasp. He had been happy in his loves, and all was well! He was sure of happiness for ever after this, for he was sanguine, and only twenty years of age. People said that he looked older than his years, and thought more than was good for him; but he was younger in thought than most men that night, and his thoughts, pure and entrancing, made his eyes sparkle and his step light.

He was marching homewards, when a man touched him on the shoulder, and reminded him of Mr. Webber's greeting earlier that day. Had the irascible father overtaken him again?

"I beg your pardon—but you were speaking to Miss Webber just now."

Neal did not recognise the voice or the speaker. The night was dark, and the lamps burned dimly, but the intruder on his reverie was evidently a stranger to him—a short thin man, shabbily attired, with a cap slouched forwards over his eyes, and a pipe in his mouth. Neal knew him not, and felt inclined to resent his interference.

"What of it?" he inquired.

"Nothing much—something it may be," he said, in a thick voice—the voice of a man whose potations had been deep that evening, "for she's a good girl, and mustn't be led away by a parcel of young swells. She's got more protectors than you are possibly aware of."

"Or you either," answered Neal.

"If it's all square—if you mean honest—why, I've nothing to say against it, of course," said the man; "but there's no telling what you fellows mean. You're not young Tressider, that's pretty evident, I think, unless I'm—I'm more drunk than I fancy!"

"What do you know of Tressider?"

"I did a little business for him once in rigging up a stage—just a little, though he didn't know who I was, and didn't care. And afterwards I had an idea that he was making up to our Carry, not that I knew anything about it. And now here's you, whoever *you* may be."

"And who are you?"

"I'm a disgrace to the family of Webber—I'm looked down upon by every one of my acquaintance—I'm the unluckiest devil that ever made himself a nuisance to society—a disgrace to myself and everybody connected with me!—why, my own father wouldn't own me, Sir!"

"You are the brother—Carry's brother?"

"Such I am, Sir," elevating himself upon his heels, and speaking with becoming dignity, but in a rusty falsetto, "and she sticks by me like a trump as she is. If it was not for her, I should have been dead long ago; and I'll stick by her, if any one means harm, so help my——"

"There, there, go home, my man, and console yourself with the assurance that no one respects your sister more than I do, or would do more to promote her happiness than I. That's all. Good-night."

"Yes, it's all very fine, but who's to back your gorgeous sentiments, my—chap? I don't believe that there's anybody to take care of Carry, or to protect Carry, but—me! Steady, Sir—the ground's a trifle uneven about here, owing to two parishes coming together, and not exactly agreeing whose pavement it is! Do you mind me holding your arm a bit while we talk this matter over?"

"Not now. Some other time, you and Carry and I together."

"At our house, with Mrs. Webber, junior—eh?"

"As good a place as any," assented Neal.

"It's as good a place as you can get for the money this side of the water—and Mrs. Webber will be ex—tremely glad to see you."

"Good-night, then."

"Good-night, Sir."

Mr. Webber, junior, raised his cap from his head, our hero returned the salute, and strode onwards, leaving his late companion with his back against a post looking after him. This was an ugly shadow to cross the bright path that Neal had been pursuing, but he chased it away with the old thoughts. Carry's brother, probably—but a man with whom he should have little to do, and one who had evidently not been turned out of doors without a fair reason for it. A *bête noire*, but nothing to trouble him—simply a foil to Carry Webber's brightness.

He had forgotten his latch-key, and had to be admitted by Mrs. Higgs, whom he feared somewhat. And yet Mrs. Higgs must shortly learn the whole story from her sister—was he not going in the morning to state his intentions to Mr. Webber, and solicit the honour of an alliance with the family, and might not Mrs. Higgs

give him some sound and profitable advice? He thought that he would take that good lady into his confidence.

"What, without your great-coat this biting night?" she exclaimed—"of all the 'prudent boys I ever heerd on, you're one!"

"I was in a hurry, and forgot it."

"Yes, to go trapesing after that gal—you ought to have something better to think on than that!"

"Mrs. Higgs, I wish to trust you with a secret," said our hero—"may I step into the parlour for a minute?"

"You're allers welcome—go in," she said.

She was in the room herself the instant afterwards, sitting at the table with her thin hands drumming upon it, and her sharp grey eyes fixed eagerly upon her visitor.

"I know what you are a-going to say—oh! more's the pity!—you've been and tied yourself to Carry Webber."

"More's the good fortune, Mrs. Higgs; there's not such another girl in all the world!"

"She isn't fit for you—she's never likely to settle down with wild blood in her like her brother's—like her mother's, and father's, for the matter of that, though I say it myself. Oh! dear, dear, how could you be so foolish?"

"I could not lose my chance of happiness, Mrs. Higgs. It was fading away from me, and I knew that I loved her. Why, I don't mind telling you now that I fell in love with her the very first day that I ever saw her."

"Ah! everybody says that," said Mrs. Higgs moodily—"well, it's done! I don't 'plain about it; you'll make her a good husband, and praps she'll make you a good wife, for she's not all bad and she's 'fectionate in her way. It aint my place to run down my own niece, but I've often thought that a tight hand like her father's on her was not the werry wust thing to bring her up proper. But is it really—*settled*, Master Neal?"

"Settled irrevocably."

"A boy like you!—good lor! a boy of your age settling things like these so coolly! Why, I couldn't be 'gaged myself, even now, without going into fits, and here you are as cool as Christmas—what'll your father say?"

"My father must not know anything about it, Mrs. Higgs," said Neal, firmly; "he is too weak in mind to disturb or consult. I am a man acting for myself, and taking the consequence of my acts—I do not fear them in this instance."

"Poor old gentleman!"

"We shall make him happy, Carry and I—we have talked about that already; she will take her place at his side one day, and say: 'Father, I have come to keep house with you, and to cheer you up while Neal's at business,'—and then all will go on famously."

"I'll pray it will—I hope it will!" cried Mrs. Higgs with excite-

ment. "I know nothing agin Carry, and I'm on'y an old woman full of 'bodings, which is natural at my age. I'll wish and pray the very best for two such young things about to take each other for all their lives—and taking it so coolly, too, that bothers me! I'll wish you every joy together, and try for it in my own way, if you'll let me; and I'll be as proud of a Galbraith marrying into my family, as though it was a markis going to be 'lated to me!"

"Thank you—thank you, Mrs. Higgs," said Neal; "you'll be my friend, and keep my secret from the old gentleman up stairs. *Now*, be my adviser."

"I don't see much good in my 'vising of you now."

"Your brother-in-law, Mr. Webber," Neal said, "what is the best way to proceed with him? I must see him in the morning."

"That's straightforward," she replied, "and praps he'll like it. Not that I ever knew him to like anything yet, but praps he will."

"There's—there's no particular way that you could recommend me to adopt towards him?" suggested our hero, somewhat anxiously—"I should like him for a friend, of course."

"I can't give any advice," said Mrs. Higgs despairingly, "that'd help you to get over *him*. I did alter him once, and got him to give his son another trial, and it ended badly for them both. He may be glad to see Carry in the hands of somebody who'll love and 'tect her—that's all I can say."

And that was all that Neal could obtain in the way of advice from Mrs. Higgs; she could not see a way to soften the obduracy of Mr. Webber, if he were obdurately inclined, and she could but offer a faint hope that he might be pleased to be rid of a daughter to whom he had never been affectionate.

After this Neal went to bed, and passed a restless night thinking of his hopes and fears. His hopes of happiness with Carry, and his fears of opposition springing up hydra-headed at every step he took. But his hopes were in the foreground, for he had gained Carry's consent, and he did not believe in an opposition that could weaken their love for one another. He *was* a happy fellow, he thought, and he went to sleep about four in the morning congratulating himself on his good fortune.

He was not so absent as might have been expected over his breakfast the next morning; there was his father to attend to, and, after a fashion, even to deceive. He pictured to himself a third face at the breakfast table presently—bright and beautiful, and gladdening home with its presence. His father would love Carry next to himself, after the first little surprise at her appearance had been surmounted; everything would turn out for the best—let him but keep his father's mind undisturbed by speculations as to a change so great, and affecting him so much.

All this on his mind and yet talking of everyday matters to his

father, finally leaving for office half an hour earlier, in order that he might call upon Mr. Webber, before the worry of that gentleman's business had disturbed his equanimity for the day.

Neal, earnest and energetic as was his character, found considerable difficulty in crawling down Shepherd Street that day; nervousness seized him at the corner of the street, and the disagreeable nature of his task suggested itself with greater force at every step he took. To meet the father of one's beloved is always uphill work—*paterfamilias* with his eyes closed to the romance of the thing, and with his pockets buttoned against demands for supplies; but to meet a father whose blessing one feels doubtful concerning, and whose opinion of the match may be adverse to the match-seeker, is a task that makes the heart beat and the knees shake. Neal had no idea that it would take so much "nerve;" he had set it down as part of his duty, and had resolved upon fulfilling his task with an easy grace and dignity that should even impress Mr. Webber; but the closer he approached the carriage-breaker's domain, the more vividly his imagination conjured up the wooden-faced gentleman who had spoken his mind only yesterday!

"I think I'll leave it till I come back from business," muttered Neal, taking off his hat to let the frosty air cool his forehead for an instant; "perhaps he's busy early in the morning."

He put on his hat once more and started off for the wharf, passing Mr. Webber's house at a quick pace, and not even looking towards it, an act of deference to his future father-in-law which might tell in his favour that afternoon, he hoped. Once past the house, he slackened his speed—stopped.

"It will be just the same in the afternoon—worse, perhaps," said he. "I may as well have it over with him, like a man. I never was afraid of speaking out before—and I will not be now. Here goes with a vengeance!"

Neal, shutting his ears to the whispers of fear, right-about-faced and marched once more into Shepherd Street—crossing the road with his shoulders squared and his hands clenched. It was a resolute face, and its expression did not change as he neared the house again. He marched on, opened the gate, strode over some carriage-springs that were in the way, plunged at the knocker, and announced his arrival. His heart was beating unnaturally fast, and his knees were at it worse than ever; but his face was set due north, and only the excitement within him turned it a shade paler than its wont.

The door opened, and Carry Webber stood in the doorway.

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

"Wish me luck, Carry. Where's your father?—I'm going to speak up for both of us."

Carry, red and white, stood and gasped at our hero. His precipitate action had taken her breath away.

"Take in my card, there's a dear girl," he said, hurriedly; "tell him it's business of very great importance."

"Oh! Neal, is not this too hasty?" she murmured.

"I can't bear suspense—I must know how to act. Whether to esteem your father, or to set myself in opposition to him."

"He's at breakfast—go in at once, then, Neal, and talk to him and mother. I had better not send in your card—he hates formality, and it will only set him against you. This way."

Neal closed the street-door after him, and followed her down the passage to the parlour-door, which Carry opened.

"Father," she said, "here's a gentleman wishes to speak to you—Mr. Galbraith."

Then she made way for Neal to pass her, and hurried up stairs with a glowing face.

Neal passed into the room, and made his best bow. Mr. Webber was having his breakfast in his shirt-sleeves, and, as Neal entered, was blowing vigorously at his coffee, which he had tilted into his saucer for that purpose.

Mrs. Webber, erect and grim, with mittens on, sat before a battered tin coffee-pot, the president of the feast. On a blue dish was a square chunk of bacon, very fat, with a very brown and bristly rind—in another blue dish was a half-quartern loaf with a knife sticking in it. There had been set a plate of butter on the table, but Mr. and Mrs. Webber had condemned the innovation as extravagant, and removed it to the mantelpiece. The room was small, ill-furnished, and darkened by trade obstructions without the window; it was altogether a home to shudder at, and from which it seemed merciful to rescue Carry.

Mr. Webber continued to poise his saucer in the air, and blow vigorously at the fluid it contained, staring at our hero meanwhile. Mrs. Webber's head revolved on its axis towards the same centre of attraction, the body retaining its fixed form.

"Good-morning, Sir—good-morning, Madam."

Mr. Webber continued to blow, sending little dashes of coffee spray on to his wife's shoulder. Mrs. Webber condescended to say—

"And a good-morning to you, Sir."

Having decreased the temperature of his coffee, Mr. Webber took it off at one gulp, in black draught fashion, set down his saucer, and then broke silence.

"What's the matter?"

"I have taken the liberty of calling upon you at this early hour, to state the nature of my business, Mr. Webber."

"So I see."

"Hannah's not taken, I hope?" inquired Mrs. Webber.

"Taken—dead—Mrs. Higgs you mean?—oh! no," said our hero.

"She was looking orful bad surely, yesterday."

"When you've done *jawing*, Mrs. Webber, I'll try and speak," said her husband.

"Mayn't I open my mouth a hinstant?" snapped Mrs. W

"When anybody's got time to be entertained with what comes out of it," was the answer; "not just now."

"I don't want to speak."

"Then don't."

"I won't speak for a week!" she cried.

"Just as it suits your convenience, Mrs. Webber—I shan't ask you."

Mrs. Webber indulged in an angry sniff of defiance, and proceeded to replenish the cups.

"Well, what's the nature of *your* business, young fellow? I hope," he added, ironically, "you haven't come to call me out for my plain speaking yesterday? If you give me choice of weapons, I say—horsewhips."

Neal's face changed colour, and there rose a retort to his lips as well as a flush to his cheeks. He felt his old tempers were not quite dead within him—those angry passions which he had told Mrs. Higgs he had utterly subdued. But this man was Carry's father, and he must command himself, accept all insults, put up with all contumely, for the sake of her he loved.

"I have called to solicit your kind consideration for me as a suitor for your daughter's hand," said Neal, calmly and distinctly—it was the only speech he had attempted to rehearse last night—"I admire and love Miss Webber—I feel that I can make her happy, and I ask you not to stand between us, but to add to our felicity by granting your consent. I think I can prove that I am already in a position to support her, and that the future welfare of us both depends upon your verdict."

"You mean you want to marry Carry?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Then why don't you say so?"

"I have said so."

"May I ask how old you are?"

"I am in my twenty-first year, Sir."

Neal flattered himself that that sounded better and *older* than saying that he was twenty years of age.

"And what's your wages?"

"I am in the receipt of a hundred and twenty pounds per annum—my father, who will live with us, has also an income of his own."

"How much?"

"About fifty pounds a year."

"Ah! that's handsome!" said Mr. Webber. "Have you anything more to say?"

"Nothing, except that Carry and I are—are attached to each other, and hope that you will not refuse us your consent."

"I think——" began Mrs. Webber.

"Never mind what *you* think," interrupted her husband; "you'll leave me to answer this young fellow, if *you* please. I'm just going to say what *I* think."

"Well, Sir?" said Neal.

"I think," said Mr. Webber, putting his hands upon his knees, "that you're a fool."

"I am of a different opinion," replied Neal, taken off his guard again.

"That's possible," added Mr. Webber; "but you're a fool for all that. You're twenty years of age, and inclined to marry, like a fool, the first young woman who makes eyes at you. You've got an income that'll just keep yourself in boots and bacca, and you want to keep a wife with it—or you may want me to keep the couple of you when you're out of work, which wouldn't be quite so foolish an idea as the t'other one—and above all, you want to tie yourself to a girl who is no more fit for you than that woman," pointing to his wife, "was ever fit for me."

"A horrible day it was when I took up with such a rip," retorted Mrs. Webber; "fit for you, indeed! You're fit for nothing but to bully people."

"I think we'll have our little talk out when this young fellow's gone," said Mr. Webber, a wise suggestion on his part, at least, but then he was a man of greater education than his wife, and education tends to refine people.

Mrs. Webber sniffed again, and crossed her mittens in her lap.

"I don't say that you haven't acted on the square, young fellow," —Neal writhed every time this appellation was addressed to him—"or that I think the worse of you for it, quite the contrary. But I've made up my mind, and you might as well try to change my head into a pumpkin as to alter *me*. You don't have her!"

"I do not wish for an answer at once, Sir—I——"

"You don't have her! She's to be married to some one else, and you can't have her. She'll have a good home and a business of her own, and you can't offer either. You're only a boy, and it's all infernal nonsense coming here and talking like a man."

"You're much too young," said Mrs. Webber, darting in again, this time on her husband's side.

"Madam, I only wish your consent to our engagement—I will wait as long as you and Mr. Webber please, till you think I'm old enough, or well-off enough to take her for a wife."

"Well, that's fair."

Mr. Webber could not endure this innovation any longer.

"It don't matter a curse what's fair or unfair—it's settled—I won't have young fellows like you for a son-in-law, coming here with

your fine notions and your *grandeur*! I hate people out of business, and clerks were always my abomination—and the long and the short of it is, you won't suit, and the sooner you're out of here the better."

"Will you not take into consideration the feelings of your own daughter in this matter?"

"Won't I take into consideration the feelings of that cat?" said Mr. Webber, suddenly stamping on the tail of a scrubby grey mouser at his feet, and eliciting a hideous yell from that animal in consequence; "no, I won't!"

"She is prepared to put up with my youth, my salary, the home that I can offer her."

"And the mad father into the bargain! Ah! anything to get away from here."

"Sir, not a word against my father, please," cried Neal, rising and looking fiercely at his tormentor; "I have been taught to honour him—and his affliction, though it belongs to the past, must not be sneered at in my presence."

"What school were you brought up at?—I never had sons or daughters to honour me!"

Neal could have asked whether that was the fault of the father or the children, but he was subsiding again into quiescence, and was hoping against hope still.

"You're a wonder, I suppose," continued Mr. Webber. "Well, you're much too wonderful for me—I'm only a poor carriage-breaker, and can't afford to have such gentility in my family."

"You can afford to promote your daughter's happiness, I trust."

"She don't know where her happiness lies—she'll never be happy anywhere—it isn't in her nature. And she shan't have a chance with you, at all events!"

"Oh! yes—she shall."

"What's that? Do you mean to have her in spite of me?"

"I mean to keep true to her, and to believe in her truth towards me. If you will not give her a chance of happiness, I will, Sir—if she'll take it, and trust me. I cannot believe in any will of yours strong enough to thwart me; you give me no fair reason for an answer—nothing but insult. I dispute your right to act like this—I warn you that I shall not give up my love at your bidding—I shall be true to her, Sir!"

Neal, in his impetuosity, acted like a boy balked of a prize; but his love was as strong as his youth, and he had been stung to a frenzy by Mr. Webber's crudities. He stood up and delivered his defiance with his chest heaving, and his head thrown back; he dashed out of the house after his last words, and left husband and wife to consider them, and make such preparation as they might against the warning they conveyed. He looked up at the windows, and waved his hand to Carry, watching him from her room; she

could read the result from his flushed face, and the grave expression thereon.

It was nothing to be surprised at; it was all that she had expected, knowing her father's character, and having had several intimations as to his disposal of her. It was all on a par with the contrarieties that had met her at every step in life, and made her callous, indifferent, even at times untruthful. She was armed at all points, and was prepared for everything. It had been an unhappy home;—she had not always done her best to make it happy, though she thought she had—anything, anywhere to escape from it, and feel herself free!

CHAPTER IV

GLOBE COURT.

NEAL GALBRAITH had to bear two days of sore perplexity—forty-eight hours of suspense as to how Carry—his Carry!—was being treated at Shepherd Street after his avowal. He thought that he had concealed his embarrassment in business hours pretty well, until Mr. Pike turned his weak eyes towards him, and asked if anything were wrong.

"N—no, Sir," was Neal's answer; but going away from business that night, Pike asked again if Neal were quite sure that nothing was the matter?

"It's nothing particular, Mr. Pike, at any rate," Neal answered, thus adjured.

"You're not getting into debt?"

"Not I."

"Your father is as well as ever?"

"Better, Sir."

"And you—you haven't formed any bad acquaintances?" urged Mr. Pike—"so much depends upon that here and—hereafter."

"No bad acquaintances, Mr. Pike."

"Then why don't you tell me?" he asked, fretfully—"what's the good of going on like this?"

Neal was surprised at this little peevish outburst, and yet touched by Mr. Pike's interest in him.

"I will tell you in good time, Sir. Trust me that there's nothing wrong with me—and nothing that is likely to be wrong in anything."

"You may always come to me for the best advice, Neal," said Mr. Pike, almost conceitedly; "I wouldn't, if I were you, rely quite so much upon my own judgment. You're far from a fool, Neal, but

you are open to one temptation—we all are morally weak somewhere. Didn't you know that?"

"It never struck me before."

"I'll bring you a tract I wrote about that to-morrow. You'll be pleased with the line of argument."

"Thank you."

"And I want you to bring your father to tea with me and Addie. You'll be surprised to find how Addie has improved, since you saw her last."

"Indeed!"

"And you'll bring your father to tea?"

"I am afraid that we are engaged this week, thank you, Mr. Pike."

"If you can, do; it will be a change for your father, and I should like to see him very much."

"When he gets a little stronger he shall come, Sir."

"Thank you. Good-day."

They parted at the street corner, and Neal went home, to be tormented by further curiosity, this time on the part of Mrs. Higgs. He put that good lady off with a few words.

"The father's against me—nothing much to be wondered at in that."

"Then it's all broken off?"

"When my head's broken off," said Neal, decisively.

Later that evening, Neal found an opportunity to dart to Shepherd Street. Carry was drudge, and might be sent on errands; and he waited full of that hope for an hour—trusting to good-fortune to see her. But Mrs. Webber went on errands that night, and even crossed the road for the supper-beer.

Neal gave up his vigils after that; Carry was kept a prisoner to the house; his own impetuosity had brought upon her further indignities; and until he could rescue her from bondage he should never know a moment's peace of mind.

The next night he was on the watch again; and this time he was rewarded for his perseverance by the great gates at the side of the house being unfastened, and Carry's face peering out anxiously for him.

He dashed across the road, and into the dark archway.

"Carry, is it you?"

"Yes; I thought that you might be looking for me."

"Might be!"

She let him hold her in his arms a moment, and kiss her in the shadows, and then she gently struggled herself away from him.

"We are lovers still, Carry!" said Neal; "always lovers, until we are married. Nothing is to stand in the way of our affection—I told your father yesterday that nothing should."

"My brave Neal!" she murmured.

"Have they been very cross with you?"

"Father has—mother has at times, not always. I might persuade her this time to be on our side, but then he"—sinking her voice lower, and shuddering—"would strike her!"

"Great Heaven!—so bad as that?"

"He struck me last night, and——"

"The devil that he is!—I won't have this!—I'll go to him now! —I'll——!"

She laid her hand upon his arm.

"Patience, Neal! You must bear this, if I can. I have made up my mind; and I don't give way, any more than he does."

It was too dark to see that stern, set expression of her face—better that he did not, perhaps.

"What's to be done?" said Neal; "we must meet each other now and then. Why shouldn't we be married at once, and then I could protect you for good?"

"Give me time to see if I shall be able to love you well enough for that, Sir!" she said, in her old merry tones.

Neal made a dash at her to clasp her in his arms, and fell amongst some carriage-springs in the corner, getting entangled amongst them, and bringing himself and them down with a clatter against the gates.

"Oh! you clumsy Neal!" cried the alarmed Carry; "run away—we shall be discovered!"

"But to-morrow—to-morrow!"

"I will meet you coming home from business, if I can. Look out for me!"

Neal flew for his life. He went home very happy; he had been assured of Carry Webber's love for him, and of her resolve to keep true to him; and though it had been a fugitive meeting, under a gateway full of mustiness and stuffiness, it had been a happy meeting enough, brightened by her confidence and love.

Neal had stepped into romance, which was a bad thing for a youth who had his way to make in the world. His courtship was out of the common way, and had turned Carry Webber into a heroine; it might have been better for all had Mr. Webber accepted him as a suitor for his daughter's hand, and let things flow on smoothly to the end. A long engagement, with no barriers in the way, would have been better for these young people, even if they had seen too much of each other, and grown a little tired of love's monotony. For Neal was too young, Carry Webber too impulsive, and the matter-of-fact every-day life for them would have been so much the wiser plan, could Mr. Webber but have seen it.

But Mr. Webber's interdict took Neal and Carry into the new world—that strange, disturbed, unreal, pleasant hemisphere, where

first love is at furnace heat,—where the heart beats irregularly, and the air is enervating and affects the brain. Opposition tinged this courtship with hues of its own, and drew the lovers closer together, the ridiculous taking the place of the sublime occasionally, but all tending to strengthen their thoughts of each other, and to constitute them leading characters in a love story where all the world was against their happy union.

Carry met Neal coming from business, and they walked home arm-in-arm together, discoursing of their troubles, arranging plans for meeting, laying down all those secret signs for seeing and hearing each other, which tend so much to distract and endanger, for they lure young folk out of the common way, and strange roads lead Heaven knows whither!

Carry objected to visiting Mrs. Higgs now. Her aunt's house would be a *rendezvous* where they could easily be surprised by father or mother, and it was better that Mrs. Higgs should not know too much, lest fear should betray her to Carry's father, or she should endeavour, after her own fashion, to settle matters amicably.

No, with so much in the way, they must arrange their own plans, and bide their time, and the less Mr. Webber had to suspect the better. Presently, Carry thought, her father would consider the love affair broken off; he was a man proud of his will, and confident in its power, and he would believe that Carry had given up her thoughts of Neal, just as Neal, tired with opposition, had outgrown *his* love; then they should see each other more frequently, and be always—oh! so happy. And if they were wrong in that surmise, and the danger to their peace grew more formidable, why, it was only to be married quietly, and end all opposition.

Neal, in his hot haste, would have married at once, but Carry showed more thought than he at this juncture.

"There's no hurry, Neal; let us wait and make sure that we like each other—you and I are young enough to wait."

"But all this hiding about—this love on the sly!"

"We had better get tired of that than of each other's company afterwards. No, I'll not marry yet. I have made up my mind, and you cannot change it."

Neal found that this was true enough, and continued his love-making; across the warp of matter-of-fact life shot the golden threads of his romance, altering the pattern and brightening it, giving to it hues of their own, which might fade or wear for ever—it was doubtful which, for all depended upon those accidents with which life was full.

It was arranged between them that they were not to meet too frequently, lest the opposition in the way should become more strong in lieu of growing weaker—once a fortnight they were to see each other, on the first and fifteenth of every month, and in the face

of every obstacle. In the interim it was considered better policy to give up the Shepherd Street route to business, even to pass each other in the street, if chance brought about a meeting, without sign of recognition; to be content with looking forward to those appointed days when they could be lovers again, and tell each other of their thoughts and wishes. All this was unreal; it was out of the usual way of courtship, quite a Romeo and Juliet affair. Almost pleasant to pass her in the street—as Neal did pass her walking with her mother in the St. George's Road once—to look another way, as though all was over between them, and to think of the days striding on, which should set them side by side and hand in hand again.

Neal always met his lady-love at the Blind School at the corner of the London Road, and then they sauntered away the evening, arm-in-arm, talking of their future, of their trust in one another, of the love that was never to grow less between them, of the opposition which only strengthened love, for it rendered Carry Webber a fair martyr for his sake. Finally, there was the parting behind the barouche, which still remained in its entirety in the front garden—the farewell kiss, which Carry granted after a little feeble opposition, and which kept Neal's heart vibrating till they met again.

As they expected fair weather with their loves through life, so they had not thought of foul weather interrupting their lovers' meetings, till the fifteenth of February set in, bleak, and cold, and snowy. Neal wondered if Carry would be true to her appointment that night, as he set out to the place of meeting, and whether it would be wise of her—she was not very strong, he sometimes fancied—to brave the elements for his sake. But Carry Webber kept her word, and was there to meet him. To Neal's astonishment she came not alone, however, but accompanied by a man, whom Neal at last recognised as the shabby individual who had asked him his "intentions" on the first of January that year.

"Don't be alarmed, Neal, dear," said Carry; "this is a friend. This is my brother Joe, who was turned out of doors by my father, but whom I could not give up at everybody's bidding. He has always been a friend of mine. And this gentleman," to her brother, "is the Mr. Galbraith of whom I have just been speaking!"

"Proud to have the pleasure of an introduction, Sir," said Joe Webber, nodding his head familiarly towards Neal; "have just a foggy idea that I spoke to you once before—but then *screwed* I was, you see."

"Just a little *screwed*, perhaps," said Neal, adopting his word, and inclined to be conciliatory.

"My brother has been waiting to see me all the evening," said Carry, by way of explanation for his presence there; "he is going into the country for a month, and—and wished to bid me good-bye."

He has been kind enough to ask us to spend the evening with him, the weather being against us, Neal."

"It's not a home fit for a gentleman to step into," said Joseph apologetically, "but you're welcome to it, and it's better than courting one another in the snow. I'd do anything for Carry—so would Mrs. Webber."

"And I have not seen Mrs. Webber yet, remember," said Carry to her brother.

Neal reflected somewhat gloomily upon this proposition; he had not been struck very much by Mr. Webber's offer, but the snow was descending heavily, and the night was cold. Better anywhere with Carry, than in a palace without her.

Carry came to him and said almost sharply:

"My brother—are you ashamed of him, Neal?"

"I know nothing of him, Carry. I dare say he's a very good fellow."

"You must like him for my sake. He's very poor, but then that's not his fault, and does not set aside the relationship. He was always kind to me, and I stand by him. I know that he's weak, foolish, and fond of drink—poor Joe!—but I know that he likes me, bears no malice against anyone in the world, and is only his own enemy. I wish I were as content as he—I wouldn't mind being as poor!"

"Has anything happened, Carry?"

"Yes—a little something—I'll tell you presently—I'm put out to-night, and I want my own way in this matter. They can never blame you and me if we meet at my own brother's house."

"Have they blamed us?"

"We were seen together last time, Neal, and my father has been more hard with me, and threatens me with punishment—expulsion! Well, Neal—if I am shut out of doors, I must come to Joe or you."

"To me—now, if you will!"

"Not just yet. Only threats, Neal, and I can bear them—and brave them, as I have done to-night. 'They'll only think to-night that I have run away from Mr. Sweeny.'"

"Who's Mr. Sweeny?"

"Oh! the rival in the pork-butcher's line," laughed Carry spasmodically; "I'll tell you about him, too, at Joe's house. We'll go with Joe, Neal, dear," she said; "you must not think afterwards that I kept back anything which might have deterred you from making me your wife. Fair with you, Neal, as you with me."

"Why should I think otherwise?"

"I don't know," she said hysterically, "but everyone thinks ill of me."

"Never mind," said Neal, pressing her arm to his side, "we can put up with the opinions of people about whom we care nothing. I am sorry to find you so low-spirited."

"Try and like Joe—I have been hoping lately that when Joe knows you, and you and I have a house of our own, that we shall make a different man of him. He is so easily turned to good."

And to evil, she might have said with equal justice to Joseph, who, not participating in this hurried dialogue, was standing against a lamp-post whistling plaintively and soberly. Joe had a liking for support, and always reclined against walls or posts—physically as well as morally, he could not keep quite straight.

Carry Webber and Neal, preceded by Joe, went along the Borough Road to the streets on its left, a nest of fever-haunted, poverty-stricken streets and alleys crowded between Southwark Road, Borough Market, and the Borough. Here into Globe Court, a darker and fouler passage than the rest, went Neal and his lady-love, Joe apologising every few yards for the locality.

"It's only shelter from the rain, Mister Galbraith," he said, pausing at the last house, "and you'll see the giantess for nothing."

"See whom?"

"My Investment—Mrs. Webber. Oh! here she is!"

Joe's Investment opened the door and looked aghast at the arrivals.

"All right, my dear. It's only my sister and her young man—friends of ours come to say good-bye before we start upon our tour."

"Friends of yours are welcome, Joe."

"Why, of course they are! This way."

Into the front room, dimly lighted by a sputtering rushlight—an ill-furnished room, with windows broken and the draught whistling through them; with bare and dirty boards; an open cupboard, with its door hanging by one hinge, and poverty grinning from its shelves—together a deplorable domicile, at which Neal stood aghast. Even Carry was taken off her guard.

"Oh! so bad as this, Joe!"

"For the present," said Joe, airily; "we shall take a turn soon. I haven't a doubt of a run of luck with the good lady. Don't sit down yet, Selina, but let them have a good look at you—they're relations, almost both of 'em."

Selina remained standing as adjured, somewhat proud of her position, and of being the central object of attraction. She was a hard-featured young woman, seven feet high at least—a worn-faced woman, with a long scraggy neck, that gave her a giraffe aspect, and with thin arms terminating in bony hands of considerable size. Altogether a bony woman for the matter of that—thin by nature, and rendered thinner by necessity.

She looked shyly at Carry Webber, and brightened up as Carry shook hands with her.

"I have heard of you before," said Carry; "I am glad to see you, to think that Joe has some one to take care of him at last."

"I do my best. It aint much," she added with an embarrassed laugh; "will you sit down, Miss Webber? Will your young man sit down?"

Miss Webber took one chair, and Miss Webber's young man the other, till Neal found that host and hostess were left standing by this course. Neal rose at once, but the giantess seated herself comfortably on one corner of the table, whilst her lord and husband found the mantelpiece to rest his back against.

"Keep your seat, Miss Webber's young man," she said in a gruff voice—she was always subject to gruffness, it may be premised—"this is handy for me, and Joe likes to rest about, don't you, dear?"

"Pretty well. Does anybody mind my smoking here?"

Nobody expressing an objection, Joe lit his pipe, whilst the giantess took up an enormous muslin robe from the table, and went on with her repairs.

"You mustn't mind my working, Miss Webber, but we're off into the country the day after to-morrow. There's a horse fair, and we've gone shares with the spotted boy, and the man with the serpents. We calculate on getting on this summer, Joe and I."

"Yes, the winter's over, girl, and we're all right enough. Lord bless us all, we shall get on famously!"

"It's been a hard fight through the winter, though it's not quite done yet; but we got through it somehow, and Joe had a berth for a fortnight at the Vic, in the pantermine, and then he took a little drop too much, and the manager wouldn't stand it, or he would have been on now—wouldn't you, Joe?"

"Oh! the clown fellow was jealous," said Joe; "he thought I made too much of my part in the opening—that was it! It was all very fine to talk about drinking—that's everybody's excuse when they want to run *me* down."

"Not mine, Joe."

"Well, you've put up with me at present," said Joe; "I must say that for you. Selina, I don't think, talking about drink, that we're doing the genteel by our visitors."

Selina turned pale at this hint, and shook her head.

"I'm afraid, Joe, that it won't run to it—I'll see."

She walked to the mantelpiece, took a small pile of coppers therefrom, and began to count them in a stage whisper.

"There's only——"

"I don't care a button what there is!" said Joe, fiercely; "pass over the money, and let us show our visitors that we appreciate their coming here. We shall have plenty of money next week—I'd bet a trifle that we've ten pounds in our pockets!"

"I wouldn't build too much on that," said Mrs. Webber, giving the money to him.

Neal broke in here, to protest against money being expended on refreshment for them; and Carry seconded his protest. But Mr. Webber was firm, and would take no denial. Neal saw their poverty, and read regrets at their appearance in Mrs. Webber's eyes; he hastened to say that he was the stranger there, and, as a new-comer, pleaded to be allowed to "pay his footing!"

Mr. Joseph Webber looked disparagingly at our hero.

"I don't know whether you call that genteel manners," he said; "but I don't. It aint fashionable in Globe Court to let visitors pay for their own drink, and isn't Globe Court hospitality. I'm very glad to see you here—both of you—especially Carry, who stands by me like a trump still; and I want to show you that I feel the honour!"

Joe departed, and Mrs. Webber began to cry immediately the door was closed behind him. Neal sat on his chair, biting the ivory end of a walking-stick, in which he had recently speculated, and feeling uncomfortable and out of place, even with Carry at his side. Neal had met with reverses in life, but he had not experienced absolute poverty, and its presence in that room distressed him. He would have preferred not to know anything concerning Carry's relations, but he fancied that he could already estimate correctly the character of Joseph Webber. Carry had been led away by Joe's wrongs and misfortunes; he, undisturbed by them, could imagine that Joe had brought them on himself.

He was at a loss for a subject for discussion, and sat staring at the weeping giantess.

"Is anything the matter?" Carry asked at last.

"Not much—it's my way, Miss," she said; "I always cry when Joe's inclined to go the figure, because he won't think of the consequences, and he don't care for them a bit. He's sorry in his way afterwards, and he's as good hearted a little fellow as ever breathed; but, oh! good Lord, he will drink awful when he's got a chance; and when I married him, I married trouble!"

"Poor Joe!" murmured Carry; "you might have expected that."

"I wasn't afeard of it," she answered, drying her eyes by a vigorous knuckly application thereto; "we were a match, for he married trouble with me. He took me as an Investment, for my father had a carawan of his own, and made a good deal out of me—and I took a fancy to Joe—and it was a runaway match between us. And when we didn't get on well by our two selves, and I turned out a bad spec for Joe in all respects, he never murmured, but was just the same easy cove as ever."

"I never knew him murmur," said Carry; "he should have been a happier man."

"He's as happy as the day is long, for that matter," said the giantess; "he never frets at bad luck, because he's always thinking he's seen the worst of everything, and luck's coming round again. I wish he *would* fret sometimes!"

It was evident to Neal that this tall, ungainly being loved Mr. Joseph Webber with an affection as odd and ungainly as herself; but Neal was very tired of her "maunderings," and wondered now why Carry had not preferred the shelter of some doorway to her sister-in-law's company. He thought also, with a shudder, that he was to be related shortly to this giantess by marriage, and might have some day to ask her to tea with him and Carry; and he wondered what his father—who had been somewhat of a proud man in his best estate—would think of her.

Joe returned whilst he was ruminating, and set triumphantly a pewter vessel of gin and two glasses on the table.

"I could only borrow two glasses—but Mr. Galbraith won't mind drinking after Carry," he said knowingly; "I understand what young people are—I don't suppose there's anybody living who understands the way of the world better than I do."

"If you only understood how to make money in it, Joe," said the giantess; "that'd be a precious sight better."

"You've been getting low whilst I've been gone," he said; "back-biting your husband to these good people here. Well, that's very proper and natural, for I am not a credit to you; and you see"—turning to Neal suddenly—"this was a sordid match on my part; I speculated in Mrs. Webber's proportions, taking a mean advantage of her affection for me to make her my lawful wife, and entirely my property. The governor cut up very roughly—didn't he, Selina?"

"Well he might. I was a great loss to him—though I say it myself, there wasn't a man or woman in the trade a patch upon me," she said proudly, after tilting off the glass of gin that her husband had proffered her.

Mrs. Webber objected to spending money on spirituous liquids; but when the money was spent, she liked her fair share, or to keep more than a fair share from her husband—it was doubtful which.

Carry and Neal feigned to partake of the gin that had been provided for them, for Joseph Webber was obtrusively persistent, and anxious to be hospitable. So Carry and Neal sipped at the gin glass, and sat with the water in their eyes, listeners rather than talkers. They were both in a false position—Carry felt this too, after a while, when her brother and the giantess had drunk their gin, and become extraordinarily loquacious. After the gin, Mrs. Webber was as sanguine as her husband of the good fortune to be found at the horse fair; and they talked about their prospects incessantly for an hour, until Joe's dim faculties began to perceive that the subject was a trifle too wearisome for his guests.

"But you must tell the old lady and me about *your* prospects now, Carry," said Joseph; "we've had the talk long enough, and we should like to hear how you two managed to fall in love with each other, and what the governor said about it, and what you mean to do? As for Selina, I never knew such a woman for love stories in my life; she lives upon 'em, and wastes a fortune in penny numbers!"

"The fair sex, Joe, is always fond of love stories," said Selina, at work now in ironing out her muslin "properties," and going through somewhat eccentric evolutions with the iron.

But Carry had not much to say concerning her love-story now; her face was flushed, and she regretted Neal's presence there. She told them that she was engaged to Mr. Galbraith, and that her father was averse to the match; and then inquired if the snow were falling still, and whether if, under any circumstances, Neal and she had not better think of home.

Neal was ready—he was glad to be quit of the place, even at the expense of curtailing his interview with Carry; and he rose at Carry's hint.

"We're always ready to help you two," said Joe; "we shall be back here in a month, and glad to see you again, and help you in our way, if you want help. I know what the governor is when his back's up; and you may have to make a bolt of it, Carry, and get married. And if it's by license, why, as you're a minor we shall have to work it somehow. Always rely on us for help."

"I'd help till I dropped!" said Selina, enthusiastically. "You've been good to Joe, more good than he deserves; and I'm another friend through thick and thin, remember!" And down came the flat iron emphatically, to add its further testimony to Mrs. Webber's sentiments.

A little more desultory conversation before departure—the giantess embracing Carry like a sister, and Joe leading our hero into a remote corner, and taking him confidentially by the button-hole.

"You couldn't lend Carry's brother ten shillings for a month—could you?" he asked confidentially.

"I'll try *for once*," added Neal prudently.

Then he opened his purse, and took a half-sovereign therefrom—Joseph Webber intently interested in the operation.

"Or if you could make it fifteen shillings it would help us wonderfully; and, as there's no doubt of our paying you, it can't signify a button."

"Shall we say fifteen shillings, then?"

"If you don't mind, I'll thank you very much!"

Neal tendered the fifteen shillings, which were duly pocketed by Joseph Webber; Carry and the giantess both interested in the action, and watching from the background.

Finally, Carry and Neal quit of them at last, and emerging from Globe Court into a street wider and less dark. The snow had abated, but the streets were white, wintry and cold.

Carry put her arm through his, and looked Neal intently in the face.

"Well?"

"Well, Carry?" said Neal, with a forced smile.

"What do you think of those people?"

"Well-meaning people enough, I dare say. I am sorry to find them so poor," replied Neal, at a loss for a satisfactory answer, and dashing at anything in consequence.

"You will be ashamed of them, Neal," said Carry, with excitement. "No matter how little they may trouble us, you will be always miserable to think that they are related to you. I saw this, and I took you there to-night that you might see for yourself all that you risk in marrying me. Now—give me up!"

"I! Never, Carry!"

"Better for you and me—I shall be a disgrace to you—I am not worthy of you!" she cried; "I have thought it all over lately, and I can but see unhappiness—so much unhappiness!—in our marrying each other."

"Why, Carry, something has really happened at home to excite you thus! Something that you have not told me yet—what is it?"

"My father is very hard and stern—he is determined upon my marriage with that hateful man, and he drags me down to sit with him night after night and hear his fulsome compliments. I have resisted, and we have had high words together—father and I."

"We must end this!"

"And I—I did think that after all I had better marry Mr. Sweeny than you. I am an ill-tempered girl—you don't know me—I am mad at times, Neal!"

"You would rather marry this Sweeny than me?" said Neal, reproachfully.

"No, no; but his is a coarser mind, and will not be affected by my ways; and—and I would rather make him unhappy than you! Oh! Neal, I am sure that I shall bring you much misery."

"No, much happiness," he cried; "only misery without you. This life of uncertainty is preying upon you—we must end it at once, Carry. I will have no more of it!"

"I cannot bear any more—I am very tired of home," she sighed.

"Soon the new home, and the brighter life then, Carry. We will talk of this next time we meet, and settle everything."

"And you will put up with poor Joe for my sake, now and then?"

"Ah! and learn to like Joe, if you wish it. There, now the sunshine comes back again to the dear face that I love so much."

"And Neal Galbraith talks like the boy, rather than the man thinking soberly of marriage. God bless you, Neal!"

She flung herself upon him, and cried upon his breast. Yes, she was a weak child enough, spoiled by ill-training, wild, impulsive, even at times incomprehensible, but to be loved and cherished always, Neal thought as he held her in his arms a moment, standing by the gate of her home in Shepherd Street.

They parted more like lovers than they had left Joe Webber's house, and Neal went home unwavering, and with his heart light. The shadows might be rising here and there, but they were not to affect *his* life. Carry would be his!—and with Carry, all would be radiant enough. Without her, a successful life would be nothing to him; with her, he could bear unsuccessfulness, disreputable relations, everything, to save her from that home wherein she was misunderstood.

He thought no more of Joseph Webber's house in Globe Court—there were shadows there mayhap, but they would not fall upon his path. He was generous as well as Carry—and his was a heart full of its first love.

CHAPTER V.

A FIASCO.

TROUBLED as Neal Galbraith was at this juncture, he had the good sense to keep his troubles to himself. Past habits of life had taught him reticence, and the folly of expecting solace from common-place people. He could have told his father every word, and without a blush, had his father's mind been strong enough; he could have sought advice from him, and asked him to love Carry as his daughter. But his father was weak, and he was alone in the world; there was no one whose business it was to interfere or expostulate with him, no one else in whom he felt an entire trust could be put. He was to a certain extent a vain young man, proud of his own judgment, even a little opinionated as to his own cleverness; he was resolute, stern, and he had not been a boy, he felt assured, for many years past. It never struck him that he had had no experience in love matters, and that there he was the boy still—all romance and self-abnegation, setting his heroine amongst the angels rather than among womankind. In love matters he had not the patience to wait—and Carry being unhappy at home, would have disturbed his patience even had he possessed any.

He might have profited by the advice of Mrs. Higgs, humble and ignorant though she was; still more so by the advice of his

senior clerk, quiet, methodical, and prosy as he seemed; but then Neal was not aware that he needed advice, and the perplexities of his love-affair he set down as natural to love affairs in general. His course was plainly indicated—he had made up his mind—he was not a man likely to turn from any resolution that he had formed—and he was too unselfish and unworldly to be scared by the thoughts of a wife to support at one and twenty.

In a very quiet, humble way, his salary would be sufficient, and in good time he should work his way upwards. He did not fear and a small salary with Carry was infinitely better than a small salary without her. To be apart from her was unsettling his business-ideas, and the sooner suspense was over, the better. Neal sank his pride—for he was prouder than he knew himself—for Carry Webber's sake; his relations would be a carriage-breaker, a woman who had once been his father's housekeeper, and a drunken scamp who earned a little money by exhibiting his wife at fairs; but with all there was Carry—and without her there was misery! Neal, being sure of this, thought no more of his future relations, and of Carry's jealous anxiety concerning them; he was alert and ready. He had made Carry an offer of his hand, and he was a Galbraith, who never changed his mind.

All this, absurd and grotesque in some respects, and yet, in its reality, pitiable. There have been hot-headed, resolute boys before Neal's time—acting like Neal, rashly, but chivalrous in their rashness, and blind to after troubles. Comedy and Tragedy weaving together wild fragments of lives—Thalia drifting away, and Melpomene, in the shape of marriage troubles, advancing into the foreground; or life one burlesque to the grave's verge. There was Tragedy halting in the rear in this case; if it suited the elucidation of our story, we might catch the flutter of the black robe even now! But, for a time, we are going on gaily with the lighter muse.

Time went by, then, and these lovers met again and again—the fair weather favouring them once more. Carry had her troubles to relate, or her troubles to set aside, if her mood were a gay one; take them altogether, they were pleasant courting days enough, as they are always, no matter how the story ends. Two or three months after that meeting in Globe Court, and then Carry came like a Pythoness, with a recital of fresh indignities—of the pork-butcher's persistence, and her father's concentrative obduracy.

"I'm to go out with him to-morrow—he's to take me and mother to the Victoria Theatre—to a private box, to see some monstrous melodrama. And he never sits long by me without putting his arm round my waist, Neal, and I hate it!"

"The filthy beast!" ejaculated Neal. "I won't stand that!"

Neal thought of his rights as a lover, and gnashed his teeth

with rage. It was quite time this pork-butcher was extinguished. Carry drifted into other topics, but Neal had made up his mind to judge for himself of Mr. Sweeny's behaviour, and then act accordingly. He would go to the theatre too, he said, and Carry laughed at his determination.

"You who don't like plays, Neal!"

"No—nor pork-butchers!" said Neal, vindictively.

Neal set his father to work on a new plan the next night, stating that he should be late home from business. He disinterred an opera-glass from its slumber at the bottom of his trunk, and took it with him to Shad Thames, placing it on his desk by way of centre ornament.

"Why, what have you got there?" asked Mr. Pike, dreamily surveying the article, and pointing at it with his pen.

"That's an opera-glass of mine, Sir. I'm going to the theatre to-night."

"Good gracious! I'm very sorry. I thought I had heard you say that you objected to theatres?"

"I have altered my mind, perhaps," said Neal, affecting a light tone.

"I hope not—I wouldn't alter my mind, if I were you! A young man who has his way to make in the world can't stand too much apart from the frivolities of life. Whatever has made you think of theatres?"

Neal writhed upon his stool. He wished the subject dismissed, and tried once or twice to turn the conversation into a business channel; but Mr. Pike was absorbed in his subject, and sat at right-angles from the desk, with his hands upon his knees, watching our hero like a hawk with fishy eyes.

"What theatre are you going to, Neal?"

"Oh! the place in the New Cut. How you bother, Mr. Pike!" and Neal dashed his pen into the ink, and splashed his ledger and himself.

"The Victoria Theatre! Good gracious! Neal, what for?"

"Not for amusement."

Mr. Pike considered himself silenced at last by Neal's decisive tones; he wheeled round and faced his desk, after one sorrowful look at his fellow-clerk.

"If he had come to tea with his father—this wouldn't have happened," he muttered; "and I ought to have pressed him more. My dear Neal," he cried, spasmodically flying round again, "what are you going for, then?"

"I can't very well explain," said Neal, a little touched by Mr. Pike's face of distress; "it is not for love of melodrama; it is not that I wish for change of that kind; I'm a little unsettled—that's all. Some day I'll tell you, Sir—I can't now."

"Very well, Neal."

Mr. Pike gave up the subject for good; and Neal went to the Victoria Theatre to watch his rival.

From his place in the boxes, by the side of a gentleman in corduroys, who insisted upon keeping his cap on, and disobliging the *élite* in the rear, Neal Galbraith sat and watched. He was indifferent to melodrama, though he remembered that his greatest pleasure when a boy was to be treated to the county theatre in holiday times. But he *was* a boy then, with nothing on his mind, and a father to take care of him; now he was a self-willed man, with a father to take care of, and an influential rival to oppose him in his one desire.

That rival came at last, accompanied by Carry Webber and her mother. An hour afterwards, the lumpish features of Mr. Webber, senior, was seen at the back of the private box; Mr. Webber standing with his hands in his pockets, and his hat pulled down to his eyebrows as usual. Neal made use of his opera-glass then, and watched proceedings—Carry Webber sat between Mr. Sweeny and her mother; the latter absorbed in the play, and forgetful of "surroundings." Mr. Sweeny was a broad-faced, red-cheeked, jolly-looking man, with hair as wiry and perpendicular as the bristles of his own hogs; a man who laughed loudly at every jest of the comedian's, and even turned purple in the face with hilarity. And he *was* attentive to Carry, and obtrusive with his arms; lolling against her now and then, and nudging her at all the best jokes with a free-and-easy elbow. Neal saw Carry draw herself away and smile to him across the house; but Neal did not smile in return; he ground his teeth, and anathematised the pork-butcher between them. The rival was in his place, tormenting her to whom he had vowed to be true—"the devil take him!" muttered Neal.

Mr. Webber, looking round the house, detected Neal at last, and scowled at him; but Neal was undaunted by the scowl, even by the clenched hand which at last was shaken in his direction. Presently Mr. Webber, still surveying him, leaned forward, and whispered to the pork-butcher, who looked towards Neal also—not ferociously, as might have been expected, but with a broad grin, that made Neal's blood boil. Mr. Sweeny was evidently congratulating himself on their difference of position just then.

Neal did not understand the play; from beginning to end he only looked twice in the direction of the stage; once when there was a vociferous shout of laughter from the "house" at the comedian appearing in female habiliments too short for him—a good joke which goes down at "houses" further west still—and a second time when Mrs. Webber caught her daughter by the arm, and then flung up her mittened hands in horror. She had sat like a sullen Sphinx in spectacles till then.

Neal turned his glass to the stage for the second time, and detected Joseph Webber, one of a band of brigands, about to hurl

the hero of the drama into a cataract—a brigand, who was still Joseph Webber, standing with his back to the wing, and letting his brother supers do all the hard work.

Neal was still regarding Joe, when Joe's father suddenly poked at him over the partition behind with his umbrella.

"Come out here a moment, will you?" he said, in a fierce interrogative.

Neal obeyed, and made his way to the lobby, proudly and defiantly.

"I've told you to cut this game, and you haven't!"

"I told you that I should be true to your daughter, and I shall!"

"True to my daughter!" mimicked Mr. Webber, as perhaps he had a right to mimic any attempt at fine sentiment. "I've heard all that nonsense, and I won't have any more of it. Perhaps you don't know that Carry's to be married to Mr. Sweeny next month."

"No—I don't know that, Sir," gasped Neal, still struggling to be respectful to Carry's father.

"Well, she is. It's settled, and you needn't make a fool of yourself any longer."

"It can't be settled without Miss Webber's consent."

"Oh! yes, it can—it is. Next month, as I'm a living man, she'll be Mrs. Sweeny. Do you see those fellows on the stage there?"

"Yes."

"One of those louts is my son. I told him some years ago that if he ever robbed me again, I'd turn him out of doors—he robbed me, and out he went. I'm a man of my word."

"It might have been as well——" and then Neal paused.

"If I hadn't been," corrected Mr. Webber, "why don't you speak out like a man?"

"Sir, I will speak out like a man," said Neal, fiercely. "I don't know whether you treated your son well or badly—I don't care—but I know that you are not acting justly by your daughter Carry. I can make her happy, and am more suitable for her than that bloated idiot by her side—and he shan't have her, Sir, do what you will!"

"Oh! that's it!"

"He shan't have her!—you have no right to set him there annoying Carry by his rudeness, if you were fifty times her father. Let me pass."

Neal swept by Mr. Webber in his rage, and ran down the stairs into the street. The box to which he had pointed was empty; Mrs. Webber had lost her interest in the play after her son's appearance, and wanted to go home. Neal was in the street before them, harassed by a motherly creature in a white apron, who dis-

played a regiment of trotters in a basket, and turned him heart-sick.

"Be off!—take those things away!" cried the exasperated Neal.

"A penny each, Sir—seven for sixpence—there, you may have that one for three farthings!"

And she held up a malformed limb between her thumb and finger to the amazed eyes of Neal Galbraith, who backed away from her, and met Mrs. Webber, Carry, and Mr. Sweeny at the door.

"Hi! cab!" shouted Mr. Sweeny to a passing vehicle, which stopped at once; "now, Carry, my dear, allow me the honour?"

Neal must have been out of his senses that night to have forgotten himself so completely; his pride had taken offence at Mr. Webber's assumption of superiority, and the stern interdict upon his love-suit. He faced Mr. Sweeny, dark and lowering, and with his hands clenched.

"Do you know who I am?" he cried, "and what business I want here? I am engaged to Miss Webber, and your place is somewhere else. Find it, and go!"

"Trotters, gentlemen?—trotters for the ladies?" cried an insinuating voice behind them.

"Don't come your bluster over me," said Mr. Sweeny, who had recoiled a step, however, and turned a shade less ruddy; "you ought to know better how to behave yourself, whoever you are."

"Oh! Neal, pray go away now," said Carry.

"I will see you to your cab," said Neal, hoarsely—"stand back, Sir!"

His rival was still in his way, and he thrust him aside with an angry hand; this was Neal's "dark hour," and his rage was uppermost, and lowered him. This was the "temper," concerning which Mrs. Higgs, at an earlier date, had made inquiries.

"I never saw such impudence!" ejaculated Mrs. Webber.

"Keep back, Sir!" said Neal, threateningly, as Mr. Sweeny once more advanced, red in the face this time.

"Trotters, gentlemen?—*yah!* Lord save 'em, there they go!"

And there they certainly went, basket and all, on to the miry pavement, under the cab wheels, into the road. Mr. Sweeny, who lacked not courage, had flung himself suddenly towards Neal, kicking out one leg behind as he advanced, and meeting with the bottom of the trader's basket in consequence. Mr. Sweeny paused at the cry of distress, and Neal, kicking away sundry trotters in his progress, led Carry to the cab, and placed her in it.

"Don't stop to quarrel," cried Carry—"if you love me, go!"

Neal glanced round at his rival arguing with an excited woman, whose maternal aspect had all vanished, stepped hastily aside to allow of the entrance of Mrs. Webber, who sniffed at him disparagingly in transit, and then, meeting Carry's appealing look once more, walked

slowly and reluctantly away, praying for his rival to follow him into the Waterloo Road. But no one followed him as he walked homewards.

Half-way down the Waterloo Road, a cab passed him with half a dozen gamins clinging to the sides, and indifferent to futile lashings at them from the cabman's whip, and shouting derisive epithets, in which the word "trotters" very frequently occurred. Neal repented then of his folly, and cursed it for bringing its share of ridicule to Carry. But with his repentance he was none the less angry or dissatisfied. He went on talking to himself in a wild fashion, befitting more his father than him.

"I have had enough of this—I must act at once, or she escapes me! She shall be my wife before another week is out—I swear it!"

It was an oath as rash as had been his conduct of that night, and his guardian angels shrank away and left him to himself—his bad, stern self, in which he did not believe. Thalia went away on tiptoe, with her finger to her lips; and Melpomene crept slowly to his side, and kept pace with him homewards. Life would commence with him from that day—all before had been but the prologue leading up to this.

He thought so then. Looking back, a different man to him we have attempted to depicture, he thinks so now!



CHAPTER VI.

NEAL SEEKS ADVISERS.

NEAL GALBRAITH saw no more of the carriage-breaker's daughter for several days—days of suspense to him, fraught with evil omen. Open war had been declared between Mr. Webber and him, and each must do his best to circumvent the other—the prize being Carry Webber! Neal was full of plots, resolved to act, excited, and not himself. Business life was stale and unprofitable now, and he was merged in the meshes of a love-story, from which he made no effort to free himself.

Neal really loved Carry—he *was* different to most youths of his age—youths more rash than he would have acted less rashly when the irrevocable step was to be considered; but he had made up his mind, and was waiting, lynx-eyed, for an opportunity.

Meanwhile, what had become of Carry? This thought perplexed him, rendered him irritable, made life at the desk a something worse than life at the galleys. Mr. Pike also irritated him with inquiries—begged to know what was on Neal's mind; whether Neal had

fallen into debt, formed bad acquaintances, or been tempted into evil; and still looked doubtfully when Neal denied all three, and yet held back explanation. Mr. Pike could not imagine that Neal would have remained so distraught under other circumstances; therefore he watched Neal carefully, and left tracts relating to all kinds of moral weaknesses upon Neal's desk, worrying his fellow-clerk unnecessarily.

Neal was indignant at last, and begged to be free from a pertinacity that was galling and insulting; and Mr. Pike appeared subdued beneath Neal's protest. Thankful for freedom from one tormentor, Neal went home to Fife Street, to find, to his amazement, that tormenter sitting composedly in the front parlour in conversation with Mrs. Higgs.

"Mr. Pike—I'll never forgive this!" exclaimed Neal.

"My dear Neal, I think you will," said Mr. Pike; "I don't like to see a young man going wrong, without trying to save him. And a young man like you, too, with so great a charge on your hands!"

"I have done my duty by my charge—will you do yours, and go?"

"No, I shan't go till I like, Neal," asserted Mr. Pike, becoming red in the face, and planting himself more firmly on the chair; "I am here as a visitor to Mrs. Higgs, and you have no right to command my departure!"

Mr. Pike was indignant, and even obstinate; but only his heightened colour suggested the doubt of his equanimity being disturbed. His voice was not raised beyond its customary placidity of utterance.

"Here as a visitor to Mrs. Higgs," he repeated, as though that was his basis of argument.

"Here as a spy upon me! Good God! Sir, what am I to you that you should dog me about like this?"

"Don't get excited, Neal—I would not blaspheme, if I were you—what good can *that* do? I am not dogging you, for I was here first!"

"Mrs. Higgs, tell him nothing about me," adjured Neal; "as you are my friend, I ask you not to attempt to satisfy a curiosity that is impertinent!"

"No, not impertinent, Neal," added Mr. Pike.

Neal went up stairs, and shortly afterwards Mr. Pike departed. When the door had closed, Neal went down to pour another vial of wrath upon his landlady's head.

"What have you told him?"

"I haven't told him nothing, because I'd nothing to tell that would suit him. He came here saying how 'fraid he was you'd got into bad hands, and frightened me enough, surely. But *you* in bad hands!—oh! I gave it him for that!"

"He did not see my father?"

"He would have seen him if I had let him."

"This man's curiosity is becoming unbearable. What business is it of his?"

"I never could understand people fidgeting about other people's 'fairs. But oh! Master Neal, there is something the matter, after all!"

"Well! I have not denied it."

"It's Carry, I know!—what's she done?"

"Nothing!"

"I know it's Carry! They wouldn't let me in the house yesterday—my own sister's house!—and Webber called me a panderness, which is an animal I never heard of, though it's a 'sulting name enough, I dare say."

"Where is Carry?"

"My dear boy, how should I know? Won't they let you see her?—aint they 'posed towards the match yet?"

"They are all against me!" said Neal.

"Praps it's for the best."

"I don't want any comfort, Mrs. Higgs. You *are* my friend, you say?"

"Always—at all times a friend to you and yourn, Sir!"

"I know that—I feel that, or I should not talk like this. See to my father, then, to-night—carry your work up there, tell him that I am called out suddenly—that I am very busy just now—and take away his plans when he becomes dreamy in his talk."

"But——"

"I must go out—I can't stop here."

Neal went out on watch. He spent the night in Shepherd Street, and met with nothing to reward his vigils; he came back tired and morose. All the world seemed against him—even Carry made no sign. He would go to Globe Court the next day, and see Carry's brother. After all he did not regret the introduction, for here were friends of Carry, who would work for him.

He went early to business, and reached Globe Court at eight o'clock. The court was alive with dirty and bare-footed children, who had been turned out of doors and out of the way whilst the rooms were put to rights, or work went on. The winter was not over yet, and frost came still with the early morning; but Globe Court denizens did not study frost, and winter or summer was the same there. One toddling infant, with a black eye, and a ragged night gown, insisted upon following Neal from No. 1 to No. 17, shrieking for "a hapenny," and two or three aborigines flung stones at him.

Our hero knocked at No. 17, and waited patiently for admittance. After awhile some one from within tapped hastily upon the window glass.

"Who is it?"

"Mr. Galbraith. Can I see you for a moment?"

"All right, Sir—wait a little while, please."

Our hero waited patiently, and after some ten minutes the door was opened, and the giantess appeared in the doorway.

"Come in, Sir. We're late up to-day, and Joe's got a headache—he was out late at a hevening party, after play-house hours—you won't mind seeing him in bed, praps?"

"No—where is he?"

"In the parlour, Sir."

Neal went into the parlour, and found an extempore bed upon the floor, and a red eyed, white faced man blinking at him from a variety of articles serving as bed-clothes for the nonce.

"Ah! old fellow," was the familiar salutation from the recumbent one, "what's up now, to bring you here so precious early in the morning?"

"I want you to help me. I'm in trouble."

"The devil you are!—then you want that fifteen *pence* back. You might have known that I would have paid you when I could, and that when I couldn't, I wouldn't say anything about it—because it's hurtful to your feelings and to mine. What's-er-time?"

Neal looked from him to the wan-featured giantess, a ghastly being enough in the daylight, with her hair awry, and her dress askew.

"Not quite straight yet, Joe isn't," she said, apologetically. "Joe's allers over-friendly when the drink's in him. And he was coming home at twelve, to the minute, he said!"

"Jones had a—card—party—till—four," said Joe, slowly and decisively; "and I promised Jones, whenever he had a card-party, to make one—and it's no good, now—it's—all—over, kicking up a blessed row about it! What's-er-time?"

"Half-past eight, nearly," said Neal; "I must go now. Will you be at home this evening?"

"Engaged at Vic. for a week, obliging friend of mine who's—who's not *let out* till Saturday. I don't get any pay for it, but I oblige a friend, and no one can ever say I didn't oblige a friend—ever. What's-er-time, you say?"

Neal told him again, as he looked down at the dirty floor. He might have guessed the futility of coming here for help, he thought.

"I suppose something has gone wrong with you and Carry?" said the giantess, sitting down unceremoniously on Joe, who struggled away from her, and then went off into a half doze; "if you'll tell me, I'll let Joe know, when he's able to understand better, and he and I may be of help."

"They have hidden Carry away from me—they are determined that she shall marry some one else. I must see her, or hear from her! Joe might watch the place in the day-time, whilst I am away. We must meet duplicity with craft!"

"Joe's a deep 'un, when he likes," said Mrs. Webber thoughtfully; "he often sees her when we're pushed hard, and she's very good, and gives us wittles, and clothes, and money on the sly. Joe'll manage that at once; I can't be of any help myself, for I allers gets a crowd round me—and, besides, Joe won't let me make myself too cheap, having a London c'nexion like."

"Ah! I see."

"It's like a play, all this; and I do feel for you two young 'uns kept away from each other—Joe and I married on the sly, too, and no one knowed a bit about it till it was all over. It cost Joe two pound odd, to get a license."

"A license—how is it managed?" asked Neal.

"You'll have a difficulty, because she's a miner, you see."

"Ah! I suppose so."

"Joe might go with you, as a relation of the miner—I'll make Joe a strong cup of tea, and then talk it over with him—shall I?"

"If you please."

Joe swung round again in his bed, rubbed his eyes, scratched his head, and then suddenly sat up and stared at the speakers.

"What's-er-time?"

"Time for breakfast, Joe. I'm talking of making you a cup of tea, my dear."

The giantess let her hand fall affectionately on the shoulder of the drunkard—in penury, sorrow, and drink, always true to him, and seeing virtues in him to which the outer world was blind. A woman of hard material, whose fine feelings, if she had not outgrown them, were not easily affected, and who put up with all privations for Joe's sake, repining not at her lot, though her father had had a caravan of his own!

"A cup of tea, with a dash of brandy in it. Nothing berrer."

"Lay yourself down till I make it, then. How's your head now, Joe?"

"Oh! awful, Selina—someone pickaxing it behind. Jones always has cheap gin, and bad stuff always knocks me over. What's-er-time, please?"

Joe was again informed of the time, and again proceeded to compose himself, altering his mind at the last minute, and sitting up again.

"I've heard every word you two have been palavering about," he said, knowingly; "so it's no good thinking I'm too stupid to make it out. I'll see into the matter first thing, Sir; and Carry's not to be done by the governor, wise as he thinks himself."

"He's a brute!" said the giantess.

"Not he," said Joe, quickly; "he's a man that can't put up with much—a bad-tempered sort of fellow, and don't look over things easily; but he isn't a brute. I don't say anything against him—I'd go back and manage his business for him to-morrow, if he liked,

and never rake up a word about old grievances, about being taken to the door, and him saying, 'There's your home for good, Joe!'—meaning the streets. It wasn't kind, perhaps, but I *was* a young devil—ha! ha!—and I deserved it!"

He wiped his eyes suddenly with his grimy shirt sleeves, and then began to laugh again spasmodically.

"I don't know that I'm any the worse—I do get my own way, and my Investment don't grumble much, though she could smash me if she chose—one of her accomplishments, Mr. Galbraith, is to smash flint stones with her thumb, and it draws people too, though it's all knack, bless you, not strength! And I should—very—much—like to know what the time is?"

Looking at his watch, Neal was reminded of the flight of time himself, and hastened to withdraw.

"I will call this evening to hear if there is any news," said Neal; "don't let him go half-drunk to work, Mrs. Webber."

"I think he's sharpest when half-gone, myself."

"He must not add to Carry's unhappiness in any way—remember that."

Neal went away dispirited to business—at eleven o'clock in the morning a warehouseman entered the office, and informed Neal that a gentleman wished to speak to him without. Mr. Pike left off writing to listen to this, and then watched our hero off his stool and along the office.

"Neal," he cried when our hero was at the door, "don't go—it's a writ!"

"No, it is not, Sir," said Neal.

"If it's money—if you have been in any way implicated—why, you can have it," said he; "I'm sure you'll pay me back again, and let this be a warning to you—won't you, Neal?"

Neal was touched by this man's interest in him—this man whom he had treated rudely, and whose interest in him he had resisted. There was the weakness to think ill of another in our hero's disposition, but there was the nobleness to acknowledge the error, and that is peculiar only to heroes.

Neal walked back to the desk with his right hand outstretched.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Pike, for acting as I have done towards you. I think you are my friend—my real friend, although I don't know what I have done to deserve it."

"Then you'll tell me what's the matter. I think that I can offer you good advice," he said, as he held Neal's hand in his.

"I will tell you soon, Sir; I can't now—I'm not doing wrong."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure of that, Sir," answered Neal.

"Thank God!—I *was* afraid," he murmured. "I have seen so many young men give way at your age, and drift away from all that should have helped to stay them."

"I am stronger than ever, Sir."

So he was in his resolution ; for opposition and mad passion had strengthened him. He went away promising to confess all in a few days, and leaving Mr. Pike content with his promise.

CHAPTER VII.

ORANGE-BLOSSOMS.

WE astute readers, always more or less behind the scenes, and cognizant of the machinery that sets the puppets in motion, may think that Neal Galbraith had not acted wisely in his choice of advisers. We, who attempt Neal Galbraith's history, are of the same opinion ; but Neal was not in his most sagacious mood, and it may have been already perceived that, clever and far-seeing as he was in many respects, he was not quick at judging character.

The men and women passing round him he took time to understand, arriving, in due course, at a true estimate of them—proceeding methodically towards the truth, as he had proceeded methodically in life, before he met romance in Fife Street.

It was doubtful if there were one—even Carry Webber—whom he had encountered in London, that he yet thoroughly understood—his employer, Walter Tressider, Mr. Pike, or Mrs. Higgs. There was a faint consciousness, scarcely a suspicion, that Mrs. Higgs was sorry for his engagement to her niece, and that turned him from her to her ne'er-do-well nephew.

And under the gateway, with his back to the wall, Neal found that nephew talking to Mr. Tressider. Joe Webber was, very like his father, in the habit of wearing his hat or cap on his eyebrows, and keeping his hands in his pockets ; and it was a little strange that those habits should imply so much that was careless and irresolute in Joe, and so much that was inflexible in Joe's sire.

Joe and Mr. Tressider had only exchanged a few words.

"What do you want here ?"

"Waiting for a friend, Sir."

"What gentleman attached to my establishment has the honour of your acquaintance ?"

"I'm waiting for Mr. Galbraith."

"Your friend, eh ?"

"I don't see why he shouldn't be, governor."

Neal came up at this instant, and Mr. Tressider said, almost sharply—

"Do you know this gentleman, Mr. Galbraith ?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Then the less you know of him the better, I fancy."

And Mr. Tressider walked into the counting-house.

"Complimentary," said Joe, shrugging his shoulders, and then screwing himself into a comfortable position against the gateway; "though I don't suppose he sees much good in me—for I don't myself. Well, here I am, prompt and ready for business."

"And sober, Joe?"

"Sober as a judge! Oh! I come round wonderfully, if I'm managed well—the Investment knows how to manage me first-rate—she's too good for me, Sir, upon my soul!"

Joe was scarcely up to the mark of perfect sobriety, but he was not incoherent, and he evidently had something to communicate.

"I've brought a letter from——"

"From Carry!" Neal interrupted eagerly—"you have seen her, then?"

"To be sure I have. I slipped into the old Clarence in the back-yard—the gates are open all day, you know—and I managed to see her. She's kept in a room at the back of the house—her father's locked her in, because he can't trust her. He never could trust his children, somehow."

"The villain! He has no right to treat her with that indignity!" said Neal.

"He's not over particular how he treats people," replied Joe, carelessly; "he means well enough, I dare say, and he only wants her to marry a chap with a good business—old Sweeny, too, one of the best fellows out."

"Where's the letter?"

"She wrote it off, and dropped it down to me—here you are!"

Neal broke the seal, and read the following hastily-written lines:—

"DEAR NEAL,

"There was a dreadful quarrel—the worst of all of them—after we got home from the theatre. So bad, that even Mr. Sweeny took my part against my father, and saved me from—blows! I am a prisoner in my room when father is away from business—at home he is my gaoler, who will have no mercy till I promise to marry whom he pleases. Did you ever hear of a parent locking up his child before, and teaching her, by every mean action, to hate him? I am desperate, Neal. I shall escape, and be at Globe Court to-morrow night. I will live with Joe until you marry me! I am very miserable, and yet—

"Ever yours affectionately,
"CARRY."

"I should like to read that letter when you have done with it," said Joe coolly.

"It concerns you partly—here it is."

Joe read it carefully, and then scratched his head.

"She's a young silly—she's always in a hurry about things, and I never could understand people in a hurry. Why, I don't believe she's eighteen—not quite eighteen yet."

"Eighteen weeks ago."

"That's very young to kick over the traces; and she isn't like a man, who can rough it," he said thoughtfully. "You're fond of her?"

"Fond of her!" cried Neal. "I'd die for her!"

"You're not such an old one, either—a queer couple, you two, as ever came together—I can't make either of you out!"

"Your wife was speaking of a license—can we obtain one without opposition?"

"Lor bless you, yes! Will you leave it to me to manage?"

"I am in your hands."

"And you are inclined to chance it? You'll marry Carry at once?"

"To be sure I will."

"She can't live with me long—she'd be more comfortable with you than that. You'll make her a good husband, I fancy; and she's as light and gay as a fairy, when she's happy. That you won't mind, heavy as you look, somehow."

"I am oppressed with heavy and uncertain thoughts, Joe."

"All right. When will you come with me, and get this license?"

"Now."

"That's sharp work," said he, deliberating for a moment. "Praps it's as well—if you've both made up your minds, I don't see what there is to wait for. And if she runs away from home, why, it's best settled at once."

"A hundred times best."

"Come on, then."

Neal ran back to beg leave of absence for an hour, and then set forth with Joseph Webber towards Doctors Commons, Joseph arranging his toilet by the way, buttoning his seedy coat to the chin, and bringing a rusty black neckerchief from under his ear to the front.

"This is left to me, and you mustn't interfere, mind."

"I know nothing of the formula; I am in your hands."

"And whatever I say, take it coolly, Mr. Galbraith, please, or you'll spoil all."

"Whatever you say?"

"Yes, or you lose Carry, you see."

Neal did not see anything very clearly, but Joseph Webber seemed well up in matters as arranged at Doctors Commons. Neal was in a mist, and went on blindly; he could think of nothing save that Carry

might escape him; the picture of Carry, a prisoner in her father's house, filled him with too much rage to think coolly of his prospects.

They went on, each silent and thoughtful, Joseph Webber swaying a little in his walk, but keeping his hands in his pockets and striding rapidly onwards. They were at Ludgate Hill, and proceeding under the famous archway at last. The men with the aprons were deceived by them—quick of scent as these touters are—and let them pass, till Joe turned back and spoke to one. Then Neal, Joe, and the man went on together, the man running a few steps in advance, and finally ushering them into a little shop, where there was nothing to sell, and behind the counter of which a red-nosed clerk was eating sandwiches.

"Is Mr. Spoonbill up stairs? Wedding license, Sir."

Mr. Spoonbill was up stairs, and Neal and Joseph Webber went up stairs together after a few minutes' delay, and found Mr. Spoonbill behind his table—a suave and sandy man, who was ready at once to open this new account with Hymen.

He looked from one to the other with a faint air of surprise, but he had had great experience in human kind, and there was little to astonish him in that way now.

"A license?—oh! yes, we can soon settle that little matter. Name of bridegroom—you are the bridegroom, I presume?" to Neal.

Neal nodded, and furnished the proctor with his name and address, age and parish, Joseph Webber correcting his age for him by saying twenty-one, much to Neal's amazement.

"You were born on the first of January, 18—, why, of course you were!"

This particular proctor took matters very easily. They might state what age they pleased, it was a matter of no concern to him, so that he got his fees. People who came after licenses said all kinds of things—just what suited their convenience—and swore all kinds of things were true, which were not.

He went on coolly and complacently.

"Twenty-one years of age—Southwark parish—Southwark Church, of course?" he said, filling in with great rapidity.

The full particulars concerning the bride were entered into by Joseph Webber, who spoke with great preciseness.

Caroline Webber was her name, eighteen was her age, Globe Court was her residence, and Southwark her parish. She was an orphan; her father and mother had been both Webbers of Westminster, and he was her legal representative, her brother Joseph Webber, nearest relation living. The gentleman writing in these details, or part of them, guessed at the story. Joseph Webber had made a good match for his sister, or his sister had got into trouble, poor thing, and the young rascal before him had been made to do justice to the wronged one; something or other of that sort, most likely

"This way, gentlemen."

Neal sat horrified at all this lying—he had writhed in his chair and clenched his hands, but he could not say anything, and they were not *his* lies, at least. The worst was over, Neal thought, and he and Joe went down stairs and across the street with Mr. Spoonbill into another empty kind of shop, where two gentlemen were sitting, and to whom Mr. Spoonbill immediately began to state his business and show his papers.

Neal sat oppressed at the chest, and more bewildered than ever. Some one put in his hands a book—a Bible—and proceeded to administer an oath to him. He set his teeth hard, murmuring an unintelligible sentence, when one of the gentlemen said briskly,

"Kiss the book."

Neal bent his head forwards, then drew back suddenly and returned the book; but the oath was taken as delivered, and there were no vigilant eyes upon him—every one was busy or indifferent, and dreamed of nothing out of the common way. Neal's license was granted, and Neal went across to Mr. Spoonbill's quarters and paid his fees, and was wished by that gentleman every happiness in life.

He came out into the daylight pale and fierce.

"I did not know that you expected me to perjure myself, Joe Webber," he said; "there can be no happiness for me after all these awful falsehoods."

"Bless you, they're nothing," said Joe; "everybody tells them here, and they don't affect the marriage—nothing affects that. They don't care what you say—it's all a matter of form; if you had told them that you were going to marry a pig-faced lady of ninety, and that you were a hundred and two, they would have thought it all right and square. And where's the harm of it all?—it's true enough that you and Carry are to be man and wife."

"I hope so—but what a way to obtain a wife!"

"It's all her father's fault."

"Ah! that it is," and Neal consoled himself with that assurance, although the ugly black untruths to which it had been supposed he had sworn, rose up before him and marred his satisfaction.

Joe and he separated, Neal promising to call very early to-morrow, and wait at Joe's house till Carry came—Joe promising, on his part, to let Neal know if anything should transpire in the interim. They separated near Southwark Church, whither Neal had repaired to give notice to the parish clerk of a wedding the day after to-morrow. Neal had made up his mind, and all was settled, so far as he was concerned! If Carry did not appear to-morrow night, why, it was but a postponement of the day, and if she did appear, there lay the one course open to bring happiness to them both.

He went back to business more absorbed than ever, weighed down more heavily by the new thoughts which had come to him. With his happiness so fast approaching, he wondered that he felt no lighter at

heart, and he attributed it all to the petty lying and scheming by which his chance of securing Carry had been obtained. For thoughts of Carry did not deter him, and his father, he knew, would be reconciled very speedily to the change, and look on Carry as a daughter. The thoughts of what a young couple they should be, and how people would talk about them, only made him feel more confidence in himself, and in the wisdom of his step. And yet he was dull and low-spirited; he had acted for himself in life too long to seek advisers, but in his heart he yearned for one clear-headed, clever friend, such as his father might have been had not a law-suit turned his brain.

He had confidence in the wisdom of this step, it is asserted, but its importance shadowed him. Before he was at man's estate, he assumed man's duties, and took unto himself a wife; such precipitancy wordly men had laughed at, and satirised, pitying the haste of both men and women; he wished that he could call to mind one who had ever commended it. And after all, he knew so little of Carry—no, he would not think that! He knew how dearly and madly he loved her, and if she did not shrink from trusting herself with him, why should he hesitate a moment, young as he was? So he had confidence in himself, and in his mode of action, though he could not keep the shadows down.

He went home moodily. He woke the next morning very restless; he went away from office in the afternoon with more excitement, with still more embarrassment.

"As we are not very busy, Mr. Pike, I am going to ask for a holiday to-morrow."

"You can have it."

Mr. Pike did not refer him to Mr. Tressider, but gave him the requisite permission. He was perfectly assured that Neal Galbraith could be spared.

"I—I may not take the holiday, but come here at nine in the morning just the same."

"Not certain, then?"

"Not quite, Sir."

And then Neal beat a retreat, lest Mr. Pike's curiosity should once more revive to disturb him. Neal went to Globe Court with a beating heart, and found only the giantess at home, ironing again at her immortal muslin, and preparing for conquest over all other monstrosities at Basingstoke Fair.

"No Carry?"

"Why, not yet, afore it's dark, I should think. Will you sit down and wait for her?"

"No, I'll return presently."

Neal went home to Fife Street, had tea with his father, and then rose to withdraw once more.

"Going out again, Neal?" said the old man, plaintively.

"Yes, to-night, on business."

"How busy they always are at Hopeful's!"

"A few more days, and it will all be over," said Neal, confusedly; "and then we shall settle down, you and I, and everything will be better and brighter!"

"How's that?" asked Mr. Galbraith, with more sharpness than our hero had bargained for.

"I can't explain, exactly. I think it will—I'm sure it will!"

"Neal, you have something to tell me?"

Our hero was not prepared for his father's acuteness. During the last fortnight he had not observed his father too closely, and there had been "a growing difference" in his favour still. Neal saw that now.

"I shall have something to tell you to-morrow that will please you, father. At least"—he corrected—"I hope I shall."

"You think that it will be good news, then?"

"Yes—good news!"

"And you don't want to render me too sanguine by its precipitate announcement? Always careful, Neal—how much I owe to you!"

"No, Sir—you owe me nothing. And you must forgive me all my little secrets—they are kept back for your good."

"I know that, Neal."

"And if I haven't gone into the plans lately, and have disappointed you now and then by not looking at them,"—Neal remembered suddenly setting the last "idea" aside in haste, and rushing from the house,— "we'll make it all right presently, and have a long evening or two with the arrears."

"Thank you, Neal—you're always considerate. And I really think that I have hit upon a good idea at last. A good and practical idea, my boy."

"We'll work at it next week."

After these assuring words, and leaving his father bright and cheerful at his work, Neal went back to Globe Court, and announced his presence at Mr. Joseph Webber's house.

It was past eight o'clock, and freezing again. The winter would not go away that year!

The door opened, and a pale, large-eyed girl, whom, for the instant, he did not recognise as Carry, held him by both hands, and laughed hysterically.

"It's all over, Neal—I've come!"

"God bless you, Carry! I thought you would!"

They went into the parlour, and sat down side by side, Carry holding one of his hands still in hers, dry and feverish.

"How did you escape?" he asked.

"I made no escape," she said; "I came of my own free will—with my father's consent."

"How's that?"

"He taunted me this morning about you—how poor and young you were, and how, even if we married, you and I would grow tired of each other; and I taunted him with his unnatural sternness, and his mode of treatment of me. This evening he altered very much—became cold and stern, just as he was when Joe went wrong. 'Mr. Sweeny's coming to-night,' he said. 'You'll have to decide to-night whether he's worth having. If he isn't, you can go away from here to this Mr. Galbraith, if you like—only you'll never come back again, mind that! I can't break your spirit without killing you—you won't take my advice—now act for yourself, and there's the door, if you prefer it.'"

"And your mother?"

"She never uttered a word one way or another—she never asked me to consider, or to stop—she is as tired of me as my father is."

"And you took them at their word, trusting to me, dear Carry?"

"Yes, I have only you to trust in!"

"Only! am I not sufficient?"

"Yes," she said, hurriedly; "but if we have both been foolish—if you should find out too late that you don't care for me, if you tire of me, Neal, what shall I do?"

"Is it likely that I shall?"

"Oh! we are so young—we are so young!" she wailed; "and I am afraid!"

"Courage!"

"If I went back now, before he has hardly missed me, it might be as well—and yet the terrible alternative of marrying that man!"

"You must marry me to-morrow instead—begin a new life, and a bright one with me—I shall have strength to work for you, and your happiness."

"You don't know me, Neal—you have ever thought too well of me," she said, sadly; "with you I have not always been myself."

"Yes, you have."

"No, no!" she cried, "you have not seen in me a vain, obstinate, and weak-minded girl, turned by a good word, but rendered callous by a harsh one—loving nothing but herself!"

"Not me, Carry?"

"Well, loving you for your generous thoughts of me, and thinking how hard I will try to do my duty—trying always! I think that I shall succeed, Neal—but if I fail!"

"Oh! we'll not think of failure—that's impossible!"

"I come to you with no secrets, at least—Mr.—Mr. Tressider told you all about him and me—you said so, Neal—you know that once I thought of him too much!"

"He told me of that old flirtation—I don't think that I am a jealous man. What has Mr. Tressider to do with us now?"

"Nothing. I don't wish it—it's all past, that folly—and here is

reality, and you and I are going to marry each other to-morrow. All so sudden, so unlikeli, and yet—*so true!*”

“You are excited now—you are depressed at this rapidity of action. We shall never be composed till we are married, Carry. I wish it were to-morrow morning now!”

“You will go away until the morning, Neal,” she urged. “I will meet you at the church, and Joe shall give me away. I have so much to do, and can’t spare an instant now.”

“I am unreasonable, Carry,” said our hero, rising; “but don’t distress yourself about a dress, or anything of that kind—let me see your dear self, that’s all I care about!”

Before he went away, he said—

“And your father? He might come to Mrs. Higgs’s.”

“No—I read in his face that he would not move a step to bring me back. He don’t care for *me*—he never did!”

Our hero went away somewhat reluctantly, and yet with less heaviness at his heart than suspense had set there during the last three days. It was settled—they were to be married—all would be well from that hour!

Would he have doubted it had he seen Carry fling herself despairingly towards the giantess, who had been standing all this time an unheeded witness to their interview?

“Why, Miss Webber—Carry Webber, how you do take on, to be sure!”

“I’m a wretched girl!—sick of home, and glad of the means to escape it. I’m not doing right, after all, but making him miserable as well as me!”

“Why, how can that be, child?”

“It has all happened so suddenly!—I can’t believe that he can love me!—no one ever really loved *me* long!—I am like a woman walking in her sleep!”

“Shake it off—why, if I cut this sort of caper, Joe would be ashamed of me. You’re going to be married, and ought to feel as happy as the day is long. There, shake it off—it’s too late now to fret at anything!”

“Yes, too late!” she said, with her white lips compressed; “let me see about my dress, and get over all this nervousness. There, see how strong I am—why, my hand don’t shake much now, does it?”

* * * * *

Neal Galbraith’s courting days were over next morning. Carry Webber met him with her brother Joseph and the giantess, and he and Carry took each other for better, for worse! They were both looking older than their years warranted, and no one seemed surprised at the youth of this couple. It was a gloomy day, with no

sunshine for the bride ; and the clergyman, who was an old man, shivered as he made them man and wife. The church was desolate and dark, and the clerk had lighted two burners near the altar, and made the scene more ghastly by the contrast. The frost came into the church through the half-opened doors at the end, where the face of an old woman peered, a woman interested in this match, and who had guessed Neal's mission, and followed him.

As they advanced together, between the rows of pews, yawning like open graves on either side of them, the woman disappeared ; coming down the steps, the married couple found her waiting for them.

"I thought it was to-day—I knowed it all along!—I couldn't help following, Master Neal, to give my blessing on you two young people, and to hope the best for both on you!"

END OF BOOK THE SECOND.

BOOK III.

“MARRIED AND SETTLED.”

CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG COUPLE.

THERE are few of my readers who, at one time or another of their lives, have not met with a young couple, and been startled or interested by the picture presented. It is always an odd picture—a something *bizarre*—affecting, almost unreal; there are the elements of sublimity as well as of burlesque hovering about it.

We look at the boy and girl affecting to be man and woman, and piece their story out for them, wondering if it came about in this or that wise, and marvelling at their courage or their rashness—their plunge into the great world, where true pity is so scarce! Was it opposition that drew them together, or the folly of two weak minds with no patience to endure or to wait; or the ill advice of people more foolish than they, or the obstinacy that took no advice but went against it by the rule of contrariety, or the confidence in their own strong love which, beginning early, was, they felt assured, to last for ever—or want of confidence, which feared everything false until the knot was tied, and then feared worse than ever!—or a sheer desire for novelty, or a child's revenge on itself?

Young people have married for all these reasons, for better and for worse ones; they have sunk youth early, and begun the troubles and responsibilities of life before life's knowledge was obtained, knocking their silly heads against the huge hard rock of the Unalterable. They are marriages made in haste; does the proverb always hold good about leisurely repentance?

Not always perhaps—very often, we fear. Here and there amidst the crowd do we meet with those who have been lucky in their young loves, but it is possible that to the question—"Would it not, have been better to have waited a little while?" the answer would follow now in the affirmative. And to those repenting at leisure, who, face to face with each other, find the romance underfoot, and the reality grim and ghoul-like confronting them, what a "Yes" is shrieked forth in despair, sounding from the grave of dead fancies like the wail of the lost!

Still, let us not be mistaken. We decry not early marriages, sensible early marriages, before the bloom is off the tree, and whilst the heart is young; in middle-aged folk sidling up to the altar, we hear but the rustle of dried hopes; and the little impulsive bobbings of

the hearts that are left them, are a something different and of a lower character than the tempestuous love of their juniors. Eighty years between man and woman seem a fair start in these non-marrying times—are they much wiser than the boy and girl we met once on ship-board, whose united ages were thirty-five?

The united ages of Neal and Carry were only thirty-eight, therefore the reader may judge from our foregoing remarks that we are scarcely satisfied with this match. And yet Carry was eighteen years of age—a fair age for a bride in many cases, even in Carry Webber's, had she considered matters, and not been influenced in so great a degree by the events surging round her. Those events had bewildered her, and she had leaped in the dark towards the first flame in her way, chancing all for a change. Happiness was in her own hands still; but it had never been in her own hands before, and the responsibility of steering her way towards it—through the shoals and quicksands in the way of the few who *have* a chance of happiness—may be too much for Carry. We are watchful of her from the vantage-ground.

We have a better excuse for Neal's actions, rash as they were. He *was* older than his years, we say again; he had kept house and submerged all youth long before his intimacy with Carry Webber; he had the thoughts of a man in all things, save in matters of love; but as a writer of our own day asserts that those matters tend even to make wise men fools, why he might not have stood at a greater disadvantage than other folk. He should have waited, certainly; there would have been greater heroism in the action, and Carry might have borne all, resisted and waited too, with better chances for her in the future. But waiting not, he was still far from a boy when he began house and wife-keeping. He knew the world; he understood the value of money; he was prepared to meet the expenses incidental to his new estate; to live downwards for a year or two honestly, frugally, and contentedly, believing in better times, and happy in that belief, with the bright-faced young wife to sustain him in his efforts. Unlike most young men dashing at wedlock in a hurry, Neal had not shut his eyes to the consequences. He saw them all, and if he acted unwisely in accepting them, he acted deliberately, taking them as part of his bargain, without which he should never have secured Carry. He did not sufficiently consider that Carry had not deliberated; that she had thought too much of her escape from Shepherd Street, and too little of the uphill journey she would have to make with him.

It was the quietest wedding that ever took place in the world, perhaps. There was not a new dress at the altar, there was no wedding-feast, and setting forth, after that feast, on a long journey to be happy in themselves.

Neal parted with his brother-in-law and the giantess, and took Carry on his arm to Fife Street, Mrs. Higgs following behind with a

market-basket and a door-key, wiping her eyes with the latter now and then.

Neal and Carry had gone up stairs, and surprised Mr. Galbraith at his plans.

"There is a new daughter for you, Sir—to make your hours less lonely when I am at business," said the son. "You will love Neal's wife for Neal's sake now—next week for her own."

The old gentleman set down his pencil, and then swept it, along with his compasses and drawings, on to the floor, leaving a clear table for his arms; then the face paled, and the shock of the surprise was evident enough thereon.

"Neal's—Neal's wife!" he gasped.

"I thought that you would like the facts all at once, Sir—suspense would not suit you, yet a while. This will add to everybody's comfort, father."

"I'm—glad—of—that!" he answered slowly.

"And you must bear with me for a few days, Sir, until you know me better, and can call me daughter," said Carry submissively and kindly.

Mr. Galbraith rubbed hard at his high, bumpy forehead with both hands, as though to rub the facts in, before he committed himself by a reply.

"You—you must take care of Neal," he said at last, and in a brisker manner.

"To be sure I will."

"And not get tired of me, and make me wretched. I've been very comfortable here along with him, and didn't—didn't expect this!"

Mr. Galbraith drew forth a voluminous handkerchief, and began to flourish it about; to wipe his eyes, and sob a little—finally to produce his snuff-box, and set to work in a wholesale manner at its contents. After this, he picked up his drawing materials, put his table aside, with shaking hands, and took his walking-stick from its corner-place.

"I—I think I'll take a little walk with Mrs. Higgs. I don't feel much inclined for any more work to-day," he said; "and I dare say I'm in the way a little just now."

"Not at all."

"Oh! yes, I am. I shouldn't have liked old people in my way just after I was married, pottering about, and taking snuff, and *whinnicking*. Where's Mr. Higgs, I wonder?"

And very much confused still, Mr. Galbraith tottered away, found Mrs. Higgs, and asked very submissively to be taken for a walk, because he didn't feel quite the thing, after all this change, he fancied. He sought the company and the solace of the best friend he had just then, and returned home all the better for his journey.

He came into the drawing-room again, and went at once to Carry,

taking her head between his withered hands, and kissing her on the forehead.

"God bless you, my child! Take care of Neal, he's a good young fellow—very."

Then he turned to the good young fellow and kissed him too, Neal laughing and blushing beneath the salute bestowed upon him.

"And God bless you, boy—beginning marriage early, and not telling me anything about it. Why, I might have advised you; and it wasn't as if I hadn't been getting strong and well again."

"Ah! strong and well as ever again shortly. And the three of us all happy together, with nothing to regret, and much to look forward to. My heart never felt so light."

Which it ought to have done, surely. So Neal was happy on his wedding-day; mystery was over, Carry was his wife, and there was peace of mind in Fife Street.

Whether there was peace of mind in Shepherd Street it behoves us to consider. We have to note the effect of this marriage on most of the characters sketched on our canvas.

There was *not* peace of mind in Shepherd Street.

Neal had sent a note round to the carriage-breaker's, telling Mr. Webber of his daughter's marriage with him that morning, offering him the hand of reconciliation, and asking for an answer by the bearer, a shock-headed Ganymede, who had been taken from his hoop-bowling occupation in Fife Street to convey our hero's message.

Mr. Webber read the letter, putting on for that purpose a pair of bull's-eyed spectacles, which added to his ferocity of expression.

"There's no answer—you can go," he said to the boy, calling him back before he had passed the yellow-bodied barouche to add—"and you may say that there never will be any answer—never!"

He went to the foot of the stairs, and commenced roaring forth "Johannah," until Johannah came down stairs; slow, weary, and grim.

"What's the matter with you, creeping down stairs like that?" he asked.

"Nothing's the matter. I never said there was, did I?"

"Then don't make those faces," he adjured.

"I don't see that's any business of your'n, Webber, what faces I put on—not that I was making faces—for I wasn't."

"Yes, you were."

When Mr. Webber and his wife were sitting in the parlour together, the former condescended to impart the news.

"She's done it, Mrs. Webber. She's gone off with that consequential young fool, who thinks himself a gentleman."

"Aint they married?" ejaculated Mrs. Webber.

"Oh! yes, they're married," said Webber; "if that's any comfort to you, they're married; and if they don't come to ruin and disgrace, I shall be disappointed."

"No—don't say that," she said eagerly; "after all, she's our gal!"

"No, she isn't," replied the sterner being facing her, "that's just what she isn't ever again, on any account, whatever happens. We've got our family off our hands pretty early in life, and a nice clear house we've got of it. You and I, Johannah," he added with bitter irony, "will have to enjoy ourselves in it, and be—*jolly*!"

"It all might have been wus," said Mrs. Webber.

"I don't see it."

"You never did see what other people see," said Mrs. Webber acrimoniously; "but she might have gone wrong altogether, like Joe; or Sweeny might have been a brute to her, as you've been to me, Webber—or a hundred things; and though she's been ungrateful, undutiful, flying in everybody's face, and discontented with a comfortable home, still it might have been wus!"

"I never want to see her again—I never will see her again, mind you."

"Do as you please."

"She's every bit as bad as Joe—it was born in both of 'em to be a curse to both of us, and we're well rid of 'em. Don't you ever let her into this house, or I'll have you out of it too—remember that!"

"Where's your law for it?"

"And I'll never, as long as I live, go to see her. And I'll leave every penny of my money to an hospital. Why couldn't she have married Sweeny—a sound, sensible fellow, with two shops, instead of that scowling, *cheeky* young vagabond! To think that a 'cute man like me should have been a father to such a fool like Carry!"

"Ah! you're over 'cute, Webber," commented his wife.

"I wasn't over 'cute when I married such a fright as you are!" retorted Mr. Webber, as he went from the room, slamming the door violently behind him.

CHAPTER II.

A HOLIDAY.

ON the following day Neal had to confront two criticisms, and he had only bargained for one. The marriage had been performed, and there was no need for further secrecy; he entered the office at the same moment as Mr. Pike, and passed his arm through that worthy gentleman's, as they went up the steps together.

"Mr. Fike, I have some important news for you."

"News!—why, what has happened now?"

"It is the end of the old story, which has perplexed you lately, Sir."

"Oh! then—let us have it."

Mr. Pike did not repair to his office stool, but stood by his desk in an attentive attitude. Neal, bright-faced and resolute, dashed at once into his subject:

"You have been disturbed by my embarrassed demeanour, Mr. Pike—I think that you have been troubled too, lest it stood as evidence of my moral decadence."

"Troubled, till you gave me your word, Neal."

"Thank you for placing confidence in it," said Neal; "well, the long and short of it is, that I was married yesterday morning," he said.

"Mar—*what* did you say?"

Mr. Pike would not believe that statement yet awhile, and Neal repeated it:

"I was married yesterday morning," he said.

"Married! God bless me, *you* married! Why, however—when—ever—where?"

Mr. Pike's forehead broke into a little perspiration on its own account, and his lustreless eyes stared themselves into a more prominent position. Neal laughed at Mr. Pike's dismay.

"*She* was not happy at home, and was likely to be inveigled into a marriage with some one else; so we settled all family disputes by marrying after our own fashion, and beginning life together early."

"I'm very sorry."

"No, you mustn't say that," urged Neal, "there's nothing to be sorry for—we are both fond of each other—it's a love match—I'm sure that we shall be both as happy as the day is long."

"I hope you will, with all my heart!" said Mr. Pike; "but, bless my soul, how disappointed I am in you! I took you for a steady matter-of-fact lad, who would proceed soberly in life, thinking not of marriage and giving in marriage, until you were five or six years older, and then choosing some quiet, religious, earnest-hearted kind of girl such as—many *I* could name—and settling down to the peace and rest which hallow a good match. I really did, Neal!"

Mr. Pike bit the finger-nails of his right hand, and looked disconsolately at the floor, like a man who had met with a bitter disappointment somewhere.

"I hope that I shall settle down to peace and rest, Sir, a little earlier than usual, that's all."

"Who is she?"

"She *was* a Miss Webber of Shepherd Street—a niece of my landlady."

"These nieces and daughters of lodging-house keepers are very dangerous young women," he said absently.

"Mr. Pike!" cried Neal, with a precipitancy that startled him.

"I—I beg your pardon, Neal," said Mr. Pike, recalled to decorum; "I was speaking generally—I have no doubt that you have chosen wisely and well—you are not likely to have acted hastily in so important a step."

"Not I, Sir," said Neal.

"And she is quiet and religious, doubtless. Well, you are very young, but a pure-minded, religious girl at your elbow cannot do you any harm that I know of."

"Harm! I should say not."

"Is she Church of England?—or does she belong to any particular denomination?—it doesn't matter much, if her heart be in God's work."

"Well—I haven't asked her of what denomination she is," stammered Neal; "but I'll bet ten to one it's the right."

"Bet ten to one on her religious convictions!—great Heaven, Neal, what are you talking in that profane way for?"

"I'm a trifle unsettled—you must not mind what I say, Mr. Pike," said Neal; "I would say anything foolish, my heart's so full of joy. Presently, we can talk about the denominations, Sir."

"Ye—es."

Mr. Pike still regarded Neal as a phenomenon difficult to comprehend. He had had great confidence in Neal's practical manner, his sobriety, and judgment, and now Neal was married, and did not seem to know a great deal concerning his helpmate. Mr. Pike went to his desk and commenced work, pausing in an instant to see if Neal were likely to imitate his example, and watching Neal askance when he had done so. Mr. Pike was still disturbed; he dipped his pen on the wrong side and missed the inkstand more than once; he left off writing to look steadily before him; once or twice a very odd sigh escaped him.

"I wonder," he said at last, "that you can settle down to work so soon, after this great change to you."

"I can't afford to lose any more time, Mr. Pike, or to make Mr. Tressider distrustful of my energy, but it *is* hard work to-day!" replied Neal: "when you're married, Mr. Pike, you'll find it so, if you come to business the day after the wedding."

"When I'm married!" ejaculated Mr. Pike, with visible horror expressed on his countenance; "I shan't marry—never! I don't agree with people in my circumstances marrying," he added almost sharply.

"You are thinking of Malthus."

"Malthus was an idiot—you'll never be of any good, Neal, if you keep wandering away from your work like this."

"Why, it was you, Sir, created this last divergence."

"Was it really!" exclaimed Mr. Pike; "well, that's very singular, to be sure. Be kind enough to call me to order if I behave so foolishly again."

"All right,—and if I should become dreamy myself, I'll ask you to do me a similar favour. What a bright morning it is—and yesterday was raw and cold, and had I treated Carry to a country jaunt, she would have shivered herself to death. You must see my wife, Mr. Pike."

"Certainly, I will."

"You'll like her very much indeed!"

"I don't doubt it."

Then they both went to work at their books, till Mr. Pike suddenly quitted his stool and walked into the inner office, leaving our hero alone with his love thoughts. Neal had forgotten Mr. Pike and his master's business, when the senior clerk returned.

"Mr. Tressider wishes to speak to you, Neal," said Pike.

"To speak to me? I say, Mr. Pike, you haven't told him anything about it?"

"I—I certainly mentioned it in the course of conversation. It was not a secret, I suppose?"

"No," said Neal; "I'm proud of my elevated position in the social scale; but——"

"But what?"

"But I shan't be able to stand *his* remarks very well," nodding his head towards the inner office, "if he puts on the acrimonious vein!"

"Oh! he don't mean half what he says," said Mr. Pike. "I don't mind him—why should you?"

"I rather object to solemn chaff," said Neal. "But here goes—and I won't mind him more than I can help."

Neal repaired to the office of his master, finding Mr. Tressider not yet settled down to business there, but sitting before the fire, with his hands spread out to the blaze, and his dressing-gown drawn tightly round him.

"Good-morning, Galbraith," he said. "Mr. Pike tells me that you want another holiday."

"I never said so," exclaimed the maligned young husband.

"No, he said you never told him, but I suppose you looked it, and therefore worried that sensitive gentleman. Pike's getting a bit of a nuisance—eh?"

"No, Sir—not that I perceive."

"He's a smuggler!"

"What, Sir?"

"He smuggles in suggestions to one's moral behaviour, as though he were the only moral being left upon God's earth. I can't say that I particularly admire Mr. Pike, but then *Nil admirari* is a

motto of mine. He's a good clerk—and I shall give him an excellent character."

He had said this in a lower voice, but Neal could not refrain from a rejoinder, in his great surprise.

"Why! you do not think of Mr. Pike quitting your service, Mr. Tressider?"

"He may think of quitting mine!" said Mr. Tressider, mildly. "You needn't be so quick in catching up one's subdued remarks, young gentleman. But then, you're a sharp man. Mr. Pike tells me that you were married yesterday."

"Yes, Sir."

"I never could make up my mind to undergo the ordeal," said Mr. Tressider, "and I am amazed at your courage and audacity. You have begun life early."

"And well."

"That remains to be proved, oh! prophet," said Mr. Tressider. "He is something like a wise man, or a wiseacre—it's all the same, I believe—who foretells his own prosperity. I was not very much unlike you when I was young—I took the fleeting impressions of the moment, especially when they were pleasant ones, for lasting. I could see them stretching away, strong and bright, in the future—far away beyond my ken, always the same, hopes lit by a sun ever bright in the heavens. I don't know now a more miserable wretch than I, Mr. Galbraith, so take me for your moral."

"There is a future still ahead, Sir, and, according to your own reasoning, it may be very different from the present."

"You hope it may, of course!" he sneered; "just to deprive you of the opportunity of pointing me out as the man who beggared your father, and then came to grief himself!"

"I wish you no harm, Mr. Tressider," said Neal. "I am trying to forget the past."

"I hope that you will succeed—but you will have quite enough to occupy you with the present, I dare say," he added. "Well, who's the bride?"

"Miss Webber."

"Eh?"

He looked up with more intentness than he was in the habit of displaying. Neal repeated the maiden name of his wife.

"Webber?—girl from Shepherd Street—played *Desdemona* at Jennings's—oh! yes, I remember the girl well. Rather pretty, I think?"

"Very pretty."

"No—rather pretty. A good skin stretched over unclassical features, that's all," said Mr. Tressider. "You can take a holiday to-day, Galbraith."

"Thank you, Sir."

"Thank Pike, not me, he's the ruling genius here. I wish that

he would give me a holiday more often than he does. Oh! by the way, Galbraith, I have heard from my nephew—he desires to be remembered to you.”

“He is very kind. I hope that he sends good news.”

“Pretty fair in its way. He’s a little bit sanguine just now; but I have not read the letter very attentively. He’ll be at the lowest ebb in three months—I never knew a greater idiot in my life! What are you stopping for?”

“I beg pardon—good-morning.”

“‘Gather the roses whilst you may,’ young Benedict—it’s devilish soon that the thorns outgrow the blossoms! And *do* shut the door behind you,” he added, querulously; “you and Pike are terrible fellows for leaving it ajar.”

Neal saw him turning to the fire, and cowering over it somewhat, as he went out of the room to thank Pike for the holiday that had been procured for him.

He went home at once, and bade Carry prepare for her expedition. Husband and wife sallied forth in high spirits, in search of the roses to which Mr. Tressider had alluded. Their funds were not large, and their journey was necessarily short; but it was a very happy day—Neal thinks of it still. They went to Greenwich Park, which they had almost to themselves that March morning—Greenwich Park, famous haunt of “the masses,” and capital of all the pleasure-grounds in Cockneydom. Greenwich Park, at all seasons and under all aspects, worth visiting in search of the ideal. For the first time in their lives, these young people had the clear day to themselves—they were both at their best, each grateful to the other for the bestowal of new life—each in a new world, without a frown from the old one, to mar the rejoicing. It mattered not to them that the air was keen in the park, or that the trees were leafless—the sky was bright, the sun was shining, there were birds singing amongst the branches, and the hill and dale were green and fresh as their loves. Surely they were boy and girl that day, and *younger* than their years!—they stood apart from trouble, they were all in all to each other, the cares were for the past or for the after days, not then. Neal had not seen Carry at her best until that day; her silvery laugh made his heart thrill, and seemed to vie with the music of the birds; she was capricious, witty, gay, and in all three so lovable. And Neal was different also, for he thought only of his young wife, and the heaviness of feature stole away from his face, and left him bright and handsome—a young man to be loved for himself, as she had loved him before, Carry thought, for his chivalry.

When they were tired of wandering from hill to dale, and were seated side by side, and hand in hand, they looked more like boy and girl than ever; and when she rested her head upon his shoulder, with his protecting arm thrown round her, it was the

boy's action—and very unlike the Neal Galbraith we have portrayed, and have to portray—to look away from her, and, whilst thanking God for the happiness dawning so early on him, to let the tears escape.

Poor Neal! He looks back still at this day—there is no escaping it—the blue sky deepening over head, the shadows lengthening on the grass, the fair woman at his side, free from the old home happy in her freedom, and confident in him, and the tears are in his eyes again.



CHAPTER III.

A LITTLE DIFFERENCE

WE are not about to trace step by step the progress of this couple; scarcely on the threshold of our story-proper, we have not space allotted to us for so close an analysis. Given the subject, and the space, and a detailed career of these two young housekeepers might afford interest, and remain, if we did our work well, for ever a moral worthy the attention of beginners.

A map of these two lives would be the map of that little unknown sea, on which many set forth as young as these two; here the quicksands where that ship was wrecked, and here the coast of self-will, crowded with danger signals, flashing out, "Keep back!" and there the spot where the *Good Intent* went down, and all hands lost! Neal and Carry sobered by degrees—Fife Street was to remain their home, until such time as Neal should have saved money to begin housekeeping on his own account. Carry was content with this—or, if not content, she accepted it as part of her new estate; blindly she had not made one step towards it.

Carry was happy for the first few weeks; there were no barriers in the way; the change was good for her—here she was loved, respected, even obeyed. It was a new world, in which she could rejoice; it was pleasant to be mistress within doors, and then to sally forth towards the evening in search of Neal, meeting him in his homeward route, and coming back with him.

If they did not have their evenings entirely to themselves, that was a minor affair, and troubled not Neal. Neal's father was part of the establishment, taken with Neal for better or worse—an old gentleman, who had always been manageable since his illness.

Here perhaps the first faint cloud arose—there are clouds in the heaven of the happiest marriages, and they are not wise people who murmur at infinitesimal shadowings. The reader has been very often with Neal to business, followed Neal in his courting days, and hence

has taken Neal's view of the father; but there are two sides to all questions, and now there were two sides to the character of Galbraith the Inventor.

In his affluent days, Mr. Galbraith had been an obstinate, proud, irritable little man, chafing at minor difficulties, and rendering his brain sensitive by the way in which he received them. A good, honest, open-hearted man, but a sensitive plant, as are all inventors, except inventors of story books, and they are the most gentle creatures on earth! Galbraith was aware of his failing, and in old days could lock himself in with it in his study, where it worried not his wife and child, when plans went wrong, and models would not come right. When the law-suit set in—the last great law-suit, in which victory ended in ruin—his obstinacy, or his perseverance, reduced him to his last shilling, as his irritability led his brain to the verge, and toppled it over. Then his weakness came, and he was a new Galbraith, dependent on others, looking for strength and support from the son ever faithful to him. There were no signs of the old irritabilities after that affliction, until his mind grew stronger, and his thoughts took shape once more. Then, with the old ideas, came back some remnants of the old character; although Neal, absent from business all day, knew not of the change. He was proud of his father's clearer mind and greater strength, but he guessed nothing of his father's fretfulness over his schemes, and only exulted with him when they approximated to a something almost like comprehensiveness.

Let the truth be told, then, that at times Mr. Galbraith was affected by obstinate or disagreeable moods, lasting for a little while, and easily dissipated, perhaps, but none the less objectionable. To these old weaknesses was added a new cunning, that concealed them from Neal, of whom he had grown somewhat afraid, as the wrecked mind ever fears its custodian.

Carry Galbraith, who had heard so often from Neal of her father-in-law's docility, was therefore a little surprised by the evidence afforded now and then to the contrary. Mr. Galbraith, senior, was not always the meek, uncomplaining old gentleman she had been led to expect; and though, as a rule, he was kind, yet there were certain exceptions thereto, in which he was singular. He was tenacious on the matter of his plans, and as he had a habit of mislaying his portfolio and losing his pencils, his plans rendered him irritable. Then he wanted one table all to himself by the window, and began to feel the contrast between the past and the present, and in Neal's absence to grumble at it just a little.

"I suppose that I shall never have a room entirely to myself again," he would murmur; "they were something like times when I could turn the key in the lock of my study, and not be heard of for hours. Now, I'm distracted by the rustle of dresses, the clearing up of tea-things, even your singing, Caroline, though I like your

voice, I must say that; and it's hard to fix one's thoughts, especially as they don't come quite so freely as they used."

Carry was trying hard to love the old gentleman, and she and her father-in-law were on very good terms together; but there were times and seasons with Carry—have we not hinted as much already or had it hinted to us by our characters?—when she was inclined to be irritable herself. She would have been a wonderful woman had she been free from all the failings of both father and mother.

"Presently, when Neal becomes richer, we shall have a house of our own, Mr. Galbraith, and I am sure Neal's first thought will be a 'study' for you," said Carry kindly, for she was in one of her best moods that morning.

"Oh! no, it won't," said the old gentleman, quickly—"it is not likely that I can expect that now. Neal's a married man, and has your whims to consider, not his father's. I wonder who has been moving my H. B. pencil?—I put it on the mantelpiece last night."

Mr. Galbraith stood on tiptoe, and looked all over the mantelpiece—no, some one had moved his H. B. since the preceding evening.

"And as for Neal getting richer—God bless him!" he said, suddenly desisting in his search, and looking round at Carry—"that's a chance! Clerks don't rise very rapidly—at least, they did not in my days—and the supply is greater than the demand, and that settles the question. Besides, there's one more to keep, and we did not find the housekeeping easy to arrange before—Neal never told me so, but I knew it. He was afraid of my head, as if it were not as strong as ever now, only he won't see it. You may depend upon it, Caroline, that that H. B. has gone down stairs along with the tea-things—you flounce about with things so!"

Carry went to the mantelpiece, and found the lead-pencil behind a mutilated shepherd in a violet doublet—the centre ornament, and one of the furnishing "properties" of Mrs. Higgs.

"Oh! I thought that I had looked there, my dear," he said, brightening up at the discovery. "I can't make out how I managed to miss it—I'm not generally so foolish—on the mantelpiece after all, was it?—dear, dear, how very singular! I knew I put it there—I said so—I always know where I put my things," he added, quite egotistically.

He forgot his remarks on housekeeping, and Neal's prospects, on the instant; the rest of the day he was courteous and conciliatory, but this was the first shaft aimed at Carry, and, though she disguised all evidence of the wound, it had struck home. She had anticipated all sunshine with her secret marriage, and she, not reading accurately her father-in-law's character, fancied that he looked upon her as a new incumbrance that had risen in the way of his peace and Neal's progress. Highly sensitive she was ever, and she shed a few tears over Mr. Galbraith's hard words long after he

had forgotten them. Highly proud, too, for she kept this little incident to herself; Neal should not say that she worried him with complaints when he came home tired from Shad Thames. Presently she should become used to Mr. Galbraith, and fall into his ways better. She should manage him, she considered, but, alas! Carry had never been a good tactician in her maiden days, or even with Mr. and Mrs. Webber she might have found more content.

Carry had one more difficulty to contend with in the early days—that of the well meant advice of Mrs. Higgs. Mrs. Higgs was a relation, and an old friend, to whom she could reply without loss of dignity—in days anterior to our first chapter, there had been more than one battle of words between them. Mrs. Higgs's heart was set on the well-being of this young couple—the son of the man she had served faithfully had married her own niece, and it should not be her fault if felicity did not evolve from the union. So, in the early days she seized every opportunity of offering advice to Carry,—advice concerning Neal's peculiar temperament, which she affected to understand better than Carry; advice about a wife's duty to her husband; a woman's method as to the conduct of an establishment of which she found herself the head; lectures on the art of giving way and gaining a greater victory by submission; appealing indirectly to Carry's feelings, which she knew by heart, but blundering in her method of delivery, and rousing rather than subduing, the fault of ninety-nine out of a hundred of advisers.

"Oh! I shall know how to act for my own happiness and Neal's," said Carry, a little pertly; "I'm not a child now."

"No, Carry; but I can't 'pect you to have changed your nature with your name, and you *were* a little too quick afore you married."

"When I am proceeding with too great a velocity, call me to order, aunt—not before. You know, I never could bear lecturing," said Carry, walking up stairs quickly.

The second little difference between Mr. Galbraith and Carry occurred when Carry was not in her best mood, and so made *all* the difference. Carry had fallen into housekeeping difficulties, as young housekeepers with limited means will do, and was restless and excitable herself that day. The week's money, carefully allotted and considered, had run out before its time, and there is no domestic trouble that sours the temper of the wife like that. Carry had been studying all the morning whither the money had flown, had consulted her rough book of expenditure, in which she had forgotten to enter several items, and now could not recall them to mind. The fact was positive that the money was out, but the evidence of its expenditure was negative, and therefore harassed Carry. She had not spent a penny in waste; she had given up the idea of a new pair of gloves for next Sunday, because the grocer had brought a pound of tea, in mistake for half-a-pound, and she was too proud to send it back, as though doubling the supply of Bohea were a

matter worth considering; she had even detected a flaw in the baker's account, and defeated the man with his own figures; but still there was money missing, and not to be accounted for. She would not worry Neal with her housekeeping trouble—I am sure she has the respect of every male reader for that resolution—she would wait for her next week's money and make up the amount by extra economy, pinching herself in some way or other when Neal was out and knew nothing about it.

Young couples like Neal and Carry, unless their incomes have been something exceptional, have all had these housekeeping cares, these breakers ahead in the sea of their bliss. They rendered Carry fidgety; her mother had had the housekeeping to manage in Shepherd Street, and, though there were daily differences with Mr. Webber, Carry was blameless, and only knew that money was always ready when necessary. But now, money could not be ready without levying black mail on Neal's next quarter's salary; and Neal was a keen critic, who went into accounts once a fortnight, just to make sure that matters in Fife Street were straight. Last Saturday Neal had complimented her on being the best and cleverest of housekeepers; but if, on Saturday week, there was a deficit, though he would not utter one reproach, she was assured that it would render him thoughtful. If she could only ascertain where the money had gone, she would be able to decrease her expenditure; but, according to her hasty balance-sheet, struck off on the back of a letter, there should have been money in hand, and that *was* aggravating enough surely, without having Mr. Galbraith suddenly take to his airs.

Mr. Galbraith, we may remind the reader, had two portfolios, one for plans that had been worked out and set aside—plans which Neal, be it remembered, always considered consigned for ever to oblivion. Mr. Galbraith was to forget the old ideas in his search for new ones; and this rule had held good till his mind gathered strength in Fife Street, and his memory did not so readily betray him.

Mr. Galbraith, on this very day of perplexity to Carry, suddenly remembered an idea—one of his best ideas!—that he had worked at a month since. There had been the usual failing in the machinery, and it had been set aside for further consideration, which Mr. Galbraith now suddenly thought of affording to it.

Mr. Galbraith went up stairs to his room, leaving Carry still at her balance-sheet, on the back of an old letter, her fair hair pushed back, and her white forehead dented with the lead pencil, with which she was gently hammering it. She should remember presently what had become of that four and ninepence halfpenny! Mr. Galbraith left the room serene and complaisant; he returned the reverse of these desiderata. He had been hunting about in his room for the big portfolio, and had failed to find it; he had been stooping under the bed, and struck his forehead, which was always in the way, against

the corner of a box there; he had made his head ache, and covered himself with dust; even his snuff-box had fallen out of his coat pocket, and rolled under the bed again, just as he had got up, and was trying to straighten himself. Then he had walked into Neal's room, and found the portfolio, which Neal had put behind the drawers for precaution's sake, and he had come, staggering beneath its burden—for it had grown heavy with abortions—to the stairs, down which he had dropped it, and sent a snow-storm of papers over the floor.

Mr. Galbraith swore at this. It was the first honest "damn it!" that he had given way to in Fife Street, and Neal's heart might have rejoiced to hear it so firmly enunciated.

Carry was still at the balance-sheet when he came in, red and flustered, with the portfolio open, and a mountain of papers in his arms.

"You might have heard the row at the 'Elephant!'" he said tetchily, "and you wouldn't leave off to come and help me!"

Carry had been absorbed, and had heard nothing.

"What is the matter?"

"Oh! nothing—nothing! Never mind me—I'm an incumbrance," he said; "I can't have a place to keep my things together in this house!"

"Yes, you can."

"My portfolio always stood there by the fireplace, before you came!" he said. "I suppose it's in the way, like me, and you have had it taken up stairs?"

"No, I did not have it taken up stairs!" said Carry indignantly. "Neal thought that it had better go there."

"Neal never thought so before he married!" grumbled the old gentleman; "he's full of new thoughts now. He don't pay any attention to me, and you're—you're setting him against me. I know you are!—I always thought you would!"

"Mr. Galbraith, you're unjust!" cried Carry—"you're not kind to me!"

"Who's kind to me now, Mrs. Galbraith?" he said. "Why, nobody! It would be much better if I had a room of my own somewhere. I'm too old to be worried by new faces—I'm much better by myself! I thought that you would give me my own way, just as Neal did; but you hide my portfolio—and I'm mistaken in you!"

"I have been mistaken in you!" said Carry, losing all patience. "I was told that you were all that was kind and gentle—and you're ill-tempered and unjust!"

The old gentleman swayed from his heels to his toes to consider this, with his large top-heavy forehead, increased so much in magnitude by a bump thereon, recently acquired, that it seemed doubtful if it would not overbalance him.

"Ill-tempered and unjust!" he quoted slowly; "they're hard words—I'll go to my room and think them over. Neal never called me names like that!"

He left his papers on the table and floor, and walked very uprightly from the room.

Carry watched his departure half indignantly, and half inclined to burst into tears; she was still far from composed when Neal returned, and found her still alone in the drawing-room, surrounded by an ocean of papers.

"Why, what's this, Carry?"

"Nothing—only your father and I have had a few words—silly words enough on both sides—about that portfolio."

"Words—you two!" said Neal, aghast. "Why, I have never had words with him in my life. What has it all been about, to disturb one so naturally gentle?"

"Gentle with you—not always with me, Neal!"

"You don't understand him," said Neal; "I must not have him misunderstood, or harassed," he added firmly.

Carry could not brook firmness—that roused her own obduracy, and revived the Shepherd Street battles. Alas! she was far from a heroine!

"You misunderstand him, not I!" said Carry, indignantly; "he taunts me with my intrusion here, and I cannot have that, Neal—I will not have it!"

"You forget how weak he is," said Neal; "and will not make allowance for an infirmity scarcely cured yet. Carry, you must be more generous to my old father."

"He is not generous to me—you take his part, and not mine—you, Neal!"

"I will be peacemaker—can I take a better part than that, Carry?" he said, more softly. "Where is he?"

"Up stairs."

Neal went up stairs, and found his father in his bed-room, lying full-length on the bed, sobbing violently, and with his face buried in his silk handkerchief.

"What, father!—you like this?"

The old man struggled into a sitting posture, and caught his son's hand.

"She says that I'm ill-tempered and unjust, and—and—all manner of things!" he sobbed; "I knew what it would be, when you married on the sly like—this! She'll work me out of the house—and—I—I—I can't get on with—out you!"

"Patience—you will understand each other better presently—this is only the beginning."

"Of trouble—right, Neal."

"No—we will not have any trouble," said Neal, confidently; "we have dropped trouble with our old life, Sir, and we have but

to bear and forbear now. You'll love Carry as your own daughter!"

"No, I'm sure I shan't!" was the quick reply; "you should have married a lady."

"She is a lady—one of the best—you'll see that presently. Why I have all my father's judgment to lead me in my choice—it's an inheritance!"

"You're—you're no fool, Neal—I know that."

"And you might have been a little in the wrong, just for once," said Neal, soothingly; "I have known wiser people than you even in the wrong sometimes. Carry's a sensitive girl—and perhaps you were a little harsh."

"I don't remember. I don't think that I was. I couldn't find the portfolio, certainly, and I hit my head looking for it—but I—I wasn't at all put out."

"It's all a mistake—then you will come down to tea?"

"N—no, Neal," said Mr. Galbraith, inclined to evince his obstinacy even to his son—he was so rapidly returning to his own self.

"I say yes," said Neal, very decisively.

Mr. Galbraith cowered when the stronger mind asserted its will. He was submissive, even scared.

"If you wish it, then. But she must not give me any more black looks—oh! how black she can look, Neal!"

"We can all look black at times," said Neal, in reply; "there, I expect you down in five minutes, your own cheerful self. This is the first and last misunderstanding between my father and my—wife."

"I'm sure I—I don't want to misunderstand her," whimpered Mr. Galbraith.

"In five minutes, then," reminded his son; "I have a good deal to tell you. I have brought you an invitation to an evening party for one thing."

"What's—what's that?"

Neal went away laughing; he returned to the drawing-room, to find no laughing face there, however. Carry had been brooding upon her wrongs, upon the preference which Neal had appeared to evince for his father.

"Carry," he said, advancing to her, and taking a seat by her side, "the old gentleman's cut up by this little difference—you must remember, for my sake, how weak he is."

"You will think of him more than me, Neal."

"Is that likely?"

"Yes, it is."

"When I do, upbraid me, Carry," said Neal, stealing his arm round her; "we will not bring the night upon us by vain forebodings—you are my wife, to keep it away by your love."

"Oh! Neal," she said, turning to him, clinging round his neck, and crying there; "always love me, always give me kind words, and make me grateful for them. Remember how lonely I am without you, how there is only you to trust in."

CHAPTER IV

MR. PIKE'S TEA-PARTY.

NEAL'S assertion respecting an invitation to his father was strictly correct. Neal was the bearer of Mr. Pike's compliments and requests as to the pleasure of the senior Mr. Galbraith's company at a small tea-party on the 8th of June, 18—. Neal and his wife had been invited, and Neal's father was particularly requested to accompany them.

"I do not see what good I can be," said old Mr. Galbraith.

"Mr. Pike has an idea that a change will be good for you," explained Neal; "besides, you and he are both in the scientific line, and will agree together exceedingly well."

"But I can't bear a crowd. Will there be any one else?"

"Two or three steady-going neighbours—that's all."

"Well, perhaps it will be a change. It will do you good, Caroline—you're looking pale this afternoon."

Mr. Galbraith had forgotten the disturbing elements of an hour since; his invitation to tea had altered the tenor of his thoughts—tea with a gentleman who was in the scientific line. On the 8th of June, then, Carry and her father-in-law met Neal at the foot of London Bridge, and the three went by omnibus to Bethnal Green. Mr. Pike, full of his party, had left Neal to the entire management of the office at an early hour.

"It's not a habit of ours to give parties," Mr. Pike had said, an hour or two previously, as he prepared to depart, "but Addie and I have been anxious to get you, your wife and father to Crow Street, to meet one or two friends of the right sort. People that you ought to know, and take a fancy to, Neal."

Neal said something about Mr. Pike's friends being always friends of his—and, indeed, Neal was beginning to understand Mr. Pike, and amidst the quiet, old-fashioned ways of his fellow-clerk, to detect the true friend and the good man. He knew that Mr. Pike was interested in him and his welfare, and he was grateful for that interest. Mr. Pike was certainly a curious man, anxious to sift to the bottom of all mystery; to be curious about Neal's wife, Neal's father, Neal's mode

of living even, was only a fellow-clerk's way of ⁴showing his interest awkwardly.

But then Mr. Pike was naturally a little awkward. It would have been better for all parties, perhaps, had he taken his niece's advice, and received only the Galbraiths on the eighth; but he was also naturally economic, and there were return invitations due to a few of his chapel friends, and no misgivings as to the incongruous materials he might bring together in consequence. Particular friends of his, brought together, would always be friendly with one another, he thought; but then this was his first re-union, and he had not had the benefit of experience.

The Galbraiths were the second arrivals, the first being an old lady converted from heathenism and antagonism to the human race, and brought to a sense of her condition, and an awful despondency in consequence. To this lady, tall, thin, and frightfully erect, Pike immediately introduced the new-comers, who were scared, especially Mr. Galbraith senior, by a solemn curtsey, and a heavy sigh, as she subsided into a corner again.

Neal detected a great difference in Ada Merton. She had grown into a graceful young woman since he had seen her last, although, like himself, looking older than her years, despite her bright smile, and the life in her face. Possibly all earnest faces—faces looking beyond the present hour—are old-looking faces, and Ada's was therefore strictly according to rule. Ada was a studious girl, with no knowledge of the world, and too much knowledge of Crow Street, and of Crow Street chapel-folk, for sixteen years of age. But her inner life, her real nature, had not become distorted by seclusion and latter-day asceticism, or the brightness of that face belied her. It was a contented face enough, with an expression that won you towards it, though you knew not the reason, and thought, mayhap, all the while, how plain and swarthy it was!

There seemed little but introductions going on at No. 14. Neal Galbraith had had to introduce his wife and father, in the first instance, to Mr. Pike; and then Ada entering the room the instant afterwards, Mr. Pike went through the ceremony of introducing his niece to his guests, and even to Neal.

"I have heard so much of Mr. Galbraith's young wife, that I must make a prize of her at once, and carry her away," said Addie, suiting the action to the word, and leading our heroine up stairs. "I am glad that I have seen you. How pretty you are!"

This spoken when they were together—spoken very frankly, in no flattering manner, and with somewhat of that brusqueness natural to her, and which Neal had remarked when she was a year younger.

"You're very good to flatter me," said Carry, somewhat taken aback at the first start.

"I don't flatter any one," said Ada, "it's the truth, and I do not suppose that you are ashamed of it. I wish I could change my

dark skin for a white one," she added laughingly, "and feel it was the truth to be told that I was pretty myself."

Carry had a vague idea that Miss Merton was angling for a compliment in her turn—Carry, who had not mixed a great deal with truthful people before marriage.

"I'm sure that you——" she began, when Miss Merton stopped her at once.

"Oh! don't, please," she said, "don't say a word about me, but take your bonnet off, and come down stairs. There's another knock, and more company arriving. I hope this little *soirée* will not turn my quiet old uncle's head."

"Old uncle!—is that the truth too, Miss Merton?" said Carry, quickly.

"I beg pardon—no, that's a home-phrase, which is a little exaggerated. And yet he is my old uncle—old in his love and his care for me. You have heard your husband speak of Mr. Pike very often."

"Not very often."

Ada looked surprised for an instant.

"Why, Mr. Pike is always mentioning Mr. Galbraith—I thought that they were such very great friends."

Ada and Carry went down stairs, the former to welcome the additions to the party—a stout man and a stout lady of middle age, both beaming with smiles and general affability, shaking hands heartily with the Galbraiths upon introduction, and laughing more heartily still after they had been introduced—laughing at nothing particular, which rendered the whole affair the more interesting. The stout gentleman was a Mr. Bury, and "an elder of our chapel," added Mr. Pike, in a lower tone, to Mr. Galbraith, senior, who replied at once, "Dear me, Mr. Elderberry—eh? great pleasure," and called the stout gentleman Mr. Elderberry for the remainder of the evening.

After the advent of Mr. and Mrs. Bury, came a Mrs. and Miss Plingarth, a juvenile mother in ringlets, with a daughter possessing no hair to speak of, and looking as old as the mother—both in white muslins, with blue sashes, and therefore the most "dressy" of the community. These were followed by a meek-looking old gentleman with grey hair and whiskers, who brought in a sheepish and sullen-looking son—son dropping into the first chair by the door, and declining to be introduced to anybody, evidently for private reasons or private grievances of his own. The meek man with white hair, after shaking hands with the rest of the party, was led to the Galbraiths and mentioned as the Reverend Wilbraham Hedger, and Neal felt by the impressive tones of Mr. Pike's voice that this Mr. Hedger was the great man of Crow Street, the man by whom Mr. Pike held his tenure of faith.

Carry by this time was at Neal's side again, and not overawed by the company assembled in Mr. Pike's front parlour.

"What a funny lot of people, Neal!" she whispered.

Neal had been regarding the company in the light of a funny lot himself, but jumped a little at Carry's assertion.

"Yes, but I wouldn't say so just now," said Neal.

The guests were all assembled, and Ada took the head of the tea-table, whilst the ladies and gentlemen drew their seats round, and looked towards Mr. Wilbraham Hedger, who, equal to the occasion, rose and delivered a long grace, not badly, not without earnestness, but certainly too long. Then Miss Merton poured forth the tea, and the tea-table prattle began to ripple forth in unison, Miss Plingarth rippling her hardest at David Pike, whose conquest she seemed bent on, if lavish smiles and white muslin could effect it. But then Mrs. Plingarth, who was a widow, seemed to have leanings in that direction also, and watched Mr. Pike intently, darting in little inquiries from the other side of the table, and once almost singeing herself against the tea urn in her impulsiveness.

Carry sat on one side of Ada Merton, and Mr. Hedger, junior—who had manœuvred for the place—on the other, and it was evident to all eyes that Mr. Hedger, junior, had also "leanings" for the young hostess, and did not care who knew it, though he maintained his stolid aspect, and spoke to her in an ungallant way, with his mouth full and fugitive shrimps endeavouring to escape therefrom. Mr. Galbraith, senior, had Mrs. Bury on his right, and Neal was sandwiched between Mr. Bury and the melancholy lady, whose name was Grig, by way of hideous contrast, and who had an eccentric habit of cooling her tea with heavy sighs. The Reverend Mr. Hedger had been placed on the left of Neal's father, with an object, as it turned out afterwards; but Mrs. Bury had darted, with a charming naiveté, into a history of seven little Burys left at home on the top floor of her house in the Kingsland Road, and Mr. Hedger, who had spent his life in submission, made no attempt to distract Mr. Galbraith's attention. Neal watched his father with an amused expression of countenance; he could see how utterly lost were Mr. Galbraith's attempts to follow the thread of Mrs. Bury's discourse, and yet how he strove to maintain an attentive deportment, by nodding his head at every full stop, and saying very rapidly, "Yes, yes, yes, just as you say, Ma'am."

Mr. Pike, whom Miss Plingarth would have fixed in the same manner, struggled away to address the guests collectively, to hope that they were all doing well, and all paying attention to the good things which he had provided for them. His tea-party was evidently an undertaking; one could see his embarrassment or excitement, suppressed though it was; he seemed on the watch for Addie's cues to assist with the bread and butter, and pass round the cups; he adopted furtive methods of dabbing his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief; he had never had a party in his life before, and its responsibility was almost too much for him. In little things of life,

a nervous man—in great things, which required more than common nerve, we may find him more “up to the mark,” ere he drops out of our reader’s remembrance.

Pike was grateful when the small maid—he had a small maid attached to his household, nowadays—had cleared away the tea-things; he should be enabled to escape from Miss Plingarth, to separate the guests more, and to pay more attention to Neal’s wife and Neal’s father, especially the latter, with whom he was anxious to have a few quiet minutes, Mr. Galbraith being a man after his own heart, in one thing at least.

Neal found himself addressed by Mr. Pike’s niece, after tea; there was a vacant chair by his side, then, and she took it easily and gracefully. She was a girl endowed with a rare amount of self-possession, and therefore a foil in minor matters to her uncle.

“You are scientific, Mr. Galbraith?” she said.

“I might have been, had time been allowed me, Miss Merton,” he answered; “the force of events has drifted me away from my natural tastes.”

“Uncle David has brought all his clever friends together this evening to meet your father—we are all scientific on one subject or another.”

“Oh! that accounts——”

“For the oddities of the guests,” said Addie, finishing his sentence; “well, I think it may a little.”

“In what direction are Miss Grig’s abilities turned?” asked Neal, thinking with a shudder of his recent proximity to that low-spirited female.

“Astronomy. And Mrs. and Miss Plingarth are very clever at photography.”

“Indeed! And yourself?”

“Oh! I know a little of everything, and excel in nothing, much to Uncle David’s dissatisfaction.”

“And Uncle David?”

“Well, I’m afraid that he is something like his niece—only that he knows more, and excels sometimes. Dear uncle, he is full of clever theories, and is the first to appreciate a clever thought in others. I think that he should have been something better than a clerk,” she added after a pause.

“An engineer, as my father was, to a certain extent?”

“No. I was not thinking of his cleverness, just at that moment. I would have seen him, if it had been ordered so, a minister of the gospel.”

“A grand vocation,” said Neal, a little startled at her enthusiasm.

“And he would have excelled therein, Mr. Galbraith—he is so generous and unselfish. You like him?”

"Very much—I am just beginning to understand him."

"Ah! it takes time."

She crossed to the table, to assist in arranging a variety of specimens of various subjects—a microscope, a stereoscope, &c.,—a scientific meeting was evidently setting in. Carry took her place, looking a little grave.

"How do you like these people, Neal?" she asked.

"Well-meaning people, I dare say—I cannot give a verdict on them yet awhile."

"I don't like any of them," she said, a little petulantly; "they're all so pious! I have never had anything to do with chapel people before—what am I to talk about, without outraging their feelings?"

"Why, have you outraged any one's feelings already, Carry?" asked Neal, with a laugh; "that's beginning early."

"I mentioned theatres to Mrs. Bury, just now, and I have shocked her very much!"

"Never mind—Mrs. Bury will recover in time, and I dare say we shall never see that good lady again. You and I are not chapel people—nor church people either, for the matter of that. These good folk look at life very seriously, and are all the better for it; when we are their age, we shall be serious, too."

"I shall be glad to get away from them. I cannot drop into strangers' ways so readily as you, Neal. Any one would think that you had known Miss Merton all your life."

"Hollo!"

Neal looked steadfastly at Carry. Here was a new phase of character developing itself, of which he had known little or nothing. Surely she had not objected to his conversation with Miss Merton—she was not inclined in the least to be jealous, he hoped! And yet had she not been jealous before that time—jealous of that love for his father, which she had thought greater than that love for herself?

"What do you mean by 'Hollo?'" asked Carry, still petulantly.

"I was surprised by your interest in my little conversation with Miss Merton—that's all."

"Oh! I took no interest in it—it was nothing to do with me, I suppose?" she said yawning. "Heigho! I wish we were back in Fife Street."

"We'll start early, Carry."

"There's a good Neal!"

And contented with this promise, she went to look at the microscope, which Mr. Pike had been for the last ten minutes arranging for her. Mr. Galbraith, senior, warmed into new life by the production of scientific apparatus, skipped to the table also.

"This is like the old times!" he cried, "before all my instru-

ments were sold off. The models went for a mere song, Mr. Pike, and many of them were the work of years."

"You must replace them some day," said Mr. Pike, cheerily.

"When we can afford it—not just yet."

"When I was a younger man—a mere boy, in fact—I remember hearing of Galbraith the Inventor. I did not think then that his son would ever become a friend of mine."

"We pick up all kinds of friends when we are unfortunate," said Mr. Galbraith.

"Ye-es," said Mr. Pike, regarding the old gentleman dubiously.

But Mr. Galbraith had intended no offence, and was carelessly turning over the leaves of an old *Mechanics' Magazine*.

"We cannot help misfortunes, either," said Mr. Galbraith; "we are not always the agents to our own ruin. There was my patent—you remember?"

"I have studied it all my life—the trials concerning it, and everything."

"Indeed! *Why?*"

"Oh! for many reasons," said Mr. Pike, blushing; "it was altogether a strange story—I never saw clearly to the end of it."

"I was not treated justly."

"I don't think that you were."

Neal saw the father's animation, and hastened to intrude upon it.

"This is an old story, father," he said; "we need not dwell upon it to-night, I think."

"But that scoundrel Tressider, Neal, who——"

"Tressider belongs to the by-gones," said Neal, with a meaning look at Mr. Pike. "What is he to do with you or me, or our host now?"

"Well, but about that patent," said Mr. Galbraith; "after all, it wasn't perfect, Mr. Pike. Only the day before yesterday I thought of a wonderful improvement, that would astonish the whole world; and I believe, upon my word of honour as a gentleman, that I shall work it out *in extenso*. Look here, I can trust you—Neal's friend—where's a bit of paper, I'll just give you an idea."

Neal shrugged his shoulders, and smiled at Mr. Pike; but Mr. Pike only stared at Neal in reply, as he produced some writing paper from his drawer.

Mr. Galbraith, in his true element, dropped into a chair by the table, pushed a stereoscope away with his elbow into the eyes of Miss Grig, who had appropriated that instrument, seized the pencil and paper, and looked up at his host.

"See here—this was the old idea. Now, it occurred to me the day before yesterday that all this affair could be done away with, all this remedied, by a very ingenious process—the cold blast

introduced in this way! Neal, don't you remember my alluding to it?"

"Alluding to it!—yes, but you had not finished the rough sketch; and I always wait till I see the sketch before I express an opinion."

"Well, I don't exactly remember the details—I'll work them out presently, but this was the general idea; and I—I fancied that it was rather more than usually clear, for once."

Mr. Galbraith was rather more than usually clear too—this was a night of inspiration; he had heard himself called Galbraith the Inventor again, a title of which he was once proud in his heart. He had found a man well versed in his life and actions; and, in his spasmodic confidence, he was less fearful of betraying his ideas. He sketched rapidly, and with a hand that seemed to gather force as he proceeded. With a few rough decisive lines he had laid bare his last plan—his addendum to the old master-stroke, which had hurled him from his high estate.

Neal watched listlessly; all this was nothing new to him, and pained him not a little, as evidence of his father's weakness, not strength; but Mr. Pike looked over Mr. Galbraith's shoulder, and held his breath with suspense and admiration. They were three men with a knowledge of the subject—two with a fugitive knowledge, and one with it all at his finger's ends; all three understood, the two watchers at last seeing things more clearly, and Neal even bestirring himself.

"There—that's my plan—I can work that out, I think."

"If you only can—if you'll only try!" said Mr. Pike, with excitement. "I think I see it all myself."

"Oh! do you?" said Mr. Galbraith, crumpling the sketch in his hands, and thrusting it into his pocket. "Perhaps you have seen too much."

"Neal," said Mr. Pike, entreatingly, "don't let your father lose that paper—there may be a fortune in it. I—I think that he's right."

"It will not bear the light of day on it, I am afraid," said Neal; "that is the fault of my father's plans—they are catching but not sound. Not *quite* sound," he added, noting his father's crest-fallen look.

"Perhaps all three of us might——" suggested Mr. Pike.

"I don't like partnership," said Mr. Galbraith. "I'll work it myself, and show you that I can turn out a sound idea, weak as I have become—see if I don't, Neal!"

Mr. Pike was drawn away at this juncture to describe microscopic action to Miss Plingarth, a lady intensely interested in the subject, who leaned fondly against David, whilst he was arranging his specimens, and rested her hands lightly on his shoulder, and was so anxious to follow David's inspection of a fly's wing, that she brought

her head with a smarter concussion than was bargained for against that of the operator's.

Meanwhile affairs dragged a little. Carry had not become used to "good people;" one she had unintentionally shocked, and when Ada drew her into a corner, and began to talk "seriously," to inquire about chapels on the other side of the water—what free schools, refuges, and charities were in existence there—whether Carry knew the Reverend Reginald Rolls, of Panford Street, and what she thought of him, the young wife felt herself borne completely out of her element.

Carry was at a loss for a time; she could not understand the earnestness, even the enthusiasm, of Miss Merton; she had not been brought up to regard things seriously; her father and mother had never entered a place of worship in her life's experience; they had been strict with her, and brought her up strictly, but there had been no religion in the midst of a harshness that was utterly worldly. Carry knew more about plays and players, than chapels and chapel-goers; she did not give credit for any one her own age being absorbed in what went on at quiet meeting-houses, in dirty back streets. She resented the topic at last, having been seized with the suspicion of Mr. Pike's niece desiring to show a superiority of goodness over her, and those like unto her. She professed a total ignorance of all dissenting movements; she was "fond" of theatres, she acknowledged, and too much absorbed in her own affairs to take any interest in missions yet awhile.

"I think it must be very uphill work to be always good," she said, ironically.

"Oh! but I'm never good. I only try to do a little good sometimes."

"You can't tell whether your efforts are likely to be rewarded," said Carry; "people are very ungrateful."

"I don't mind what people think of my efforts," replied Ada, with her brusqueness a little more developed.

Carry did not like the tone, and, moreover, she was in an aggravating mood, for she had seen nothing to admire in any of the company. She was inclined to be brusque also.

"We must all mind what is said or thought of us, or affect to be above ordinary mortals, I think."

"Well, I don't affect to be the latter, for there are some ordinary mortals I strive vainly to imitate."

"What good creatures they must be, though!"

"I think that they are, though they are of a different opinion. Now, there's Mr. Hedger——"

"What! that little punchy man?"

Addie's face darkened at this. She was a sharp girl—too sharp, she feared, when setting herself in evidence against herself!—and she detected the vein of acrimony running throughout Carry Gal-

braith's discourse. She was ready with her answer, but she checked it; Mrs. Galbraith was her uncle's guest, and she would not be severe upon her, if she could help it. But to call Mr. Hedger, the minister, the pastor of the flock, a little punchy man, that was too bad!

"Yes—one of the best of men that ever walked uprightly—a man above reproach, and who wins everyone's love!"

"Is he a widower?"

"No," said Addie; "but supposing he were?"

Addie was arming for the battle now, in spite of herself; there were limits to courtesy, and no young lady, High or Low Church, can bear reflections adverse to the dignity of her pet priest. But at this juncture Mr. Pike appeared, and bore her off to the table, to pay all the attention that he considered due to the greatest stranger, as well as to the wife of a young man in whose progress he was interested.

The party broke up immediately after supper, as, though nothing more to eat being likely to appear, it behoved every thoughtful personage to get away as soon as possible. The good people broke up—Neal, his wife and father, were whirled Fifth Street way in a cab; the rest of the guests walked home, a few streets' length, in more humble fashion. Mr. Pike was left with his niece at last—he rubbed one hand over the other, and thought that it had been a very successful evening. What did Addie think?"

She was afraid that it had been dull—that Mr. and Mrs. Galbraith had not enjoyed themselves.

"Oh! they were a little strange—it was new to them—I did not observe any signs of dullness," said Mr. Pike; "what do you think of Neal's choice?"

"She is a strange young woman," replied Addie; "I don't admire her very much."

"My dear, that's—that's scarcely fair."

"I shall like her better when I understand her, perhaps."

So Carry was hard to understand in this new quarter. Meanwhile, what was Carry's verdict on Ada Merton?

"What do you think of Mr. Pike's niece, Carry?" asked Neal.

"Oh! I don't like her *at all*!"

Mr. Pike's conversazione was evidently not a brilliant success.

CHAPTER V

SLIGHTLY STORMY.

MR. GALBRAITH senior was quite nervous and excitable the next morning. So nervous, that Neal, ever exercising a filial supervision, inquired, with affected carelessness, how yesternight's dissipation had agreed with his sire.

"Well—very well," he said, rubbing his hands briskly together; "that Pike's a sensible fellow, Neal."

"Yes, I think that he's clever."

"A capital memory, too—he remembered all about me, and what the world used to call me in the old days. And that last idea of mine—I—I hope I didn't let him into the secret too much!"

"He would not take advantage of your generosity."

"Oh! I don't know that," said Mr. Galbraith, doubtfully; "we can't tell whom to trust nowadays. Shall you be long clearing away the breakfast things, Caroline?"

"Neal has not begun breakfast yet, Sir," reminded Carry

"Oh! I beg pardon—I did not notice."

"You must not be too anxious about these plans, Sir," said Neal.

"No, my boy; but that last idea might be considered more. It is not quite straight—it's only the ghost of an idea at present."

"Leave it in spirit-land till next week, and take a walk with Carry this morning," suggested his son.

"No, thank you. Not this morning. I have made up my mind for hard work."

"Very well—but it *is* a beautiful morning."

Mr. Galbraith would not take the hint, and Neal did not go to business without an injunction to Carry to be watchful of his father, and see that intense application exercised no injurious effect.

At business, Neal found David Pike at his desk, somewhat red eyed and pale, as though his efforts to amuse last night's community had been a trifle too much for him.

"Good-morning, Sir."

"Good-morning, Neal. How's your father this morning?"

"Pretty well, Sir, thank you."

"Neal, I have been working at his plan all night—thinking over it, wrestling with it," he said eagerly, "and there really is something in it that might make all our fortunes."

"In all his schemes there is a little something that is sensible," said Neal.

"But he has the right idea—I once had an idea like it in some respects, and gave it up as a failure; but this is almost clear. I see it now."

"To the end—to success?"

"Not quite so far as that; but I sat up all night, trying to remember your father's plan, and working it out, in my own way, to the same end. Neal," said Mr. Pike, with excitement, "you understand these things—you and I must work together at this, at my house quietly, and then call in your father, and compare notes with him. We'll make a model first."

"And our fortunes afterwards—very well."

"And don't let him lose that paper."

Business was not flourishing that day in Shad Thames, and, the books finished, and accounts of the day satisfactorily wound up, Mr. Pike returned to the old theme. Mr. Pike was evidently engrossed by the subject—Neal remained phlegmatic to the last; he was the burnt child, who held aloof from the fire of discovery. A great discovery had been the ruin of him and his. What was to be anticipated from an improvement on that old idea? The chances were against success—and once successful, the robbers of trade, and their name was legion, would only filch the idea, and defy the inventors.

Neal did not return home with Mr. Pike that evening—on the following day he promised to make a second call at Crow Street. He returned home, to find his father fretting over his last plan, which had all gone wrong during the day.

"There's nothing much in it after all, Neal," he said, ruefully. "It's all a mistake, from beginning to end."

"Then I would not trouble my head with mistakes," said Neal; "you'll think of something better before the year's out."

"I fear not—I'm not so sanguine as I used to be."

"We'll postpone this *sine die*, at all events."

"Very well," with a little sigh; "it's no good—it only worries me when things will not come right. I have put away all the papers about it in that portfolio you used to hide from me, you rogue!"

"Just to keep them from perplexing you by their obtrusiveness."

"Yes—I suppose so. You have been a good son to me, Neal."

The old gentleman dozed off after tea, and Neal, for the first time almost in his experience, took up the portfolio recently alluded to. Mr. Pike had awakened fresh interest in his father's schemes, and he would just look at the last plan, if only to smile at its impracticability.

Carry, busy at needle-work, and waiting to be asked to join Neal in a walk before supper, or for Neal's proposition to continue the

novel he had been reading aloud to her, looked with surprise at her husband's actions.

"Oh! those tiresome, hateful papers again, Neal!"

"Just for a moment, Carry."

"Shall I put my bonnet on? Are we going out to-night?"

"Yes, I think so. I shall not be long over these."

Carry went up stairs to equip herself for a stroll—these strolls after tea with Neal were ever memorable to her, for they were full of the happiness of a past life, when she looked back upon them—and Neal looked through the portfolio for his father's last conception, and discovered it in due course, side by side with the paper which had been shown last night to Mr. Pike.

There were other papers relating to the same subject; here and there were the first ideas, struck off, and left in mid-thought; occasionally a page or two of closely-written MS. seemed to refer to the same subject; and Neal gathered them together, and pored over them, and saw, amidst the crudities of the first birth, the glimmering of a genius which misfortune had not wholly extinguished.

Neal's was an appreciative mind and could sift the real from the false; he was even clever himself, and had more than once fought hard against the temptation to be carried along the road on which his father had dropped. In his youth he had been an inventor also, until his father's misfortune had rendered him severely practical; he had thought of earning his own living after that, not of making a discovery. But that night a discovery seemed almost ready to his hand; his father's mind had strengthened, and the proof thereof was before him, in the first faint elucidation of a new principle in science. The principle was not fairly developed—the ideas were out of gear; but the elements of success were there; and time and patience bestowed upon them by men with clearer, cooler heads, might work wonders, as Pike—no sanguine man—had almost prophesied.

Neal pored over the papers, read every line of the pencil MS., studied the diagrams, finally took his head between his hands, and went of into that misty world which his father had created around him.

When he woke therefrom his father was sleeping soundly still, the clock was striking ten, and Carry, grim and passive, was sitting in a corner by the door, with her bonnet on, as she had sat for three hours, too proud to make a sign.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, Carry!" cried Neal, waking up suddenly from his father's world, "I forgot all about going out!"

"Yes—and all about me! It's of no consequence—I'm nobody—I never was anybody worth consideration!"

"I'm very sorry," repeated Neal, "but Mr. Pike was speaking

of these plans this afternoon, and I thought that they might be worth looking at."

"Why did you not say so, and not ask me to put my bonnet on?"

"I did not intend to waste all this time over them."

"You may well call it wasting time."

"And I'll not do so any more, Carry—there, will you forgive me?"

"I don't know that I shall. I don't like to sit here, looking foolish, and no one speaking to me, or thinking about me."

"Why did you not speak to me, Carry?"

"I would have died first!" exclaimed Carry, still indignant at the affront that had been put upon her.

"Well, I can do no more than apologise," said Neal, frowning a little at Carry's persistence; "and here goes the portfolio out of my sight."

"I'll burn it to-morrow—the hateful thing!"

"No—don't do that."

Neal became suddenly very stern in demeanour; and Carry turned pale, and clutched at the arms of the chair in which she was sitting. But she did not give way—her nature was a rebellious one; it was her sad inheritance, poor Carry!

"It has made words more than once between you and me—between me and him. I'll burn it!"

"I say you must not—shall not!"

"We will see."

"Eh!—what's that?—burn the portfolio!" cried Mr. Galbraith, senior, waking up; "who's thinking of such a thing as that?"

"I am, Mr. Galbraith," said Carry.

"Take out the cold-blast scheme, Neal—there's a good fellow! She'll do it, if she says so and looks like that. Take out the papers, my lad."

"I put them all in my pocket-book some time since. I am going to study them myself."

"Ah! see what you can make of them. A new mind might light upon the right idea—mine is worn out, and cannot bear the strain. Still I—I don't think it was quite right to talk of burning the papers; and I would be ashamed to threaten such a thing."

"I would be ashamed, Mr. Galbraith, to set the wife against the husband with your innuendoes," cried Carry.

"Who, I?" cried the old gentleman in return. "God bless me!—I would not do it for the world."

"You have done it to-night."

"Hush! hush!" said Neal. "Carry, you don't know what you are saying. I have vexed you, and you vent your indignation on this weak old man. I am sorry for that."

Carry's lip quivered, for Neal's voice had softened, and there was

regret in its tones. Strike the right key, and the heart was touched of this distraught girl, but woe to him who sounded for ever the wrong note.

"You have worried and teased me, Neal," she said.

"Not intentionally," was the answer; "you were hard upon my sins of omission, Carry, and would not forgive me."

"You never asked to be for—forgiven!" and then Carry gave way—like the child that she was still—and rushed from the room sobbing violently. Neal followed to make his peace with her—he was her husband, who loved her very dearly, and to tell her so was to bring the smiles and sunshine back to her face.

"I can't bear that you should think of any one—or any thing—before me, Neal. If you don't give me the first place in your heart, I shall think that you are tiring of me. And I *have* only you now!"

This was a little fugitive storm. Presently came another, despite the promises of both man and wife to hold ever aloof from the tempest.

Neal went to Crow Street the next evening, and devoted himself to the new project; if there were anything in it, let him soberly and steadily search with Mr. Pike, losing or finding the prize as quickly as possible. Neal went at the matter in a business way; he was cool, collected, and far from sanguine; should it realise all expectations, it might be but a brighter side to ruin—the inventor's fate was ever before him, a living evidence to the dangers of discovery.

But Neal had not bargained for the excitement of the chase, for the hopes to be born in the progress, for the faith in the *ignis fatuus* which led him on through the marshes. Two more sober-minded men than Pike and Neal could not have sat down to work out a theory; they were practical and careful, but even they became over-sanguine as they verged on the truth.

They began to construct a small model; by that time they had deviated considerably from the first plans of Mr. Galbraith, senior; the chances seemed evidently in their favour; there were several hitches in the way still, but they both had patience, and Mr. Pike, and even our hero, sank a little money—neither could afford much—in the scheme and buoyed up their hopes with new ventures.

"When we are a little more advanced," Pike would say, "we will call your father in again; for the present, we will work as quietly as we can together, keeping this as much a secret as possible."

Neal had lost some of his coolness during these studies; he was in full chase of the grand idea, and had become more thoughtful, looking forward to the hopes ahead of him. In the good time, he should rise from Fife Street, taking Carry and his father with him; but he refrained from speaking of that good time, lest

natures more sanguine than his own should build too much upon it, and feel perhaps in the bad time the disappointment more keenly. Neal became abstracted, even taciturn. The discovery came between him and his wife, as discoveries always will, despite the efforts of the genius to keep them down.

He spoke now and then of his plans to Carry, who did not understand them, and who took but little interest in them, for the reason that he veiled his own interest on principle, and spoke indifferently.

Carry, a girl ready to jump at conclusions, began to think that Neal's plan was but an excuse to keep away from home more frequently, to leave her for society more congenial in Crow Street. In her heart she was jealous of Ada Merton, as young wives, tenacious of trifles, and with but one hope to cling to, will be jealous if their moral training have been even more closely attended to than Carry's.

Carry did not believe in grand discoveries, and thought that Neal did not believe in them either, or he would not so frequently shun all allusion to them. She forgot that it had been her husband's rule in Mr. Galbraith's presence before she had known him; she forgot even that faith in Neal which had led her to trust him implicitly with her future. Far from a heroine, the reader perceives—only a commonplace woman, irritable, jealous, inconsiderate, taking in material for her own unhappiness, and storing it up day by day.

Unconsciously she helped to deceive Neal, by doing her best to present a cheerful appearance, and telling him not of her troubles—Neal should not say that she was discontented, or grieving. He should always find her ready to meet him with a smile, she thought; and if the plans took him away to Mr. Pike's, and left her to amuse her variable old father-in-law, she would bear with his absence as long as she was able. But, heigho! she was not so happy as she thought she should have been—she was sure that Neal did not love her so well as he used—that he was becoming tired of her by degrees!

She would bear all this quietly now—it was part of her lot, and she would not complain any more. The happiness to which she had looked forward as Neal's wife was fading away; but she could sit on the rock lonely and desolate, like Ariadne. Then Carry gave up watching and waiting patiently for explanation; and one night, full of jealous curiosity, the wife of eighteen years made her appearance in Crow Street, and surprised the students there.

"Carry," said Neal, bewildered at her advent; "has anything happened to father?—what is it?"

Carry had looked round, and felt relieved that Ada was absent, and had left the two men poring over their model and papers. Mr. Pike had just returned from his little work-shop at the back, and was black and grimy, after furnace-studies.

"Nothing has happened," Carry replied; "only—only I was tired of being at home, and thought that I would come for you."

"You are very kind," said Neal, quietly; "I shall not keep you long. I have only five minutes more work here."

"I am sorry that Ada has gone to chapel this evening," added Mr. Pike; "she would have been very pleased to see you, I'm sure."

"It's of no consequence."

Carry felt that she had made a false step, and that angered her rather than subdued her. Retracing with humility the wrong road is always a hard task—had been to Carry ever trebly difficult. Kind words and gentle hands had not sustained her by the way, and she had gone forwards, after a little struggle with her better nature. She did not like Neal's tone of voice and was inclined to resent it. Mr. Pike made matters worse.

"Ada's not often out so late as this—only now and then. She's clever enough at mechanics to help us—eh, Neal?"

"Now and then."

"When we are making our fortunes over this, Neal," said Mr. Pike, "we must allow her a percentage on the profits."

So Miss Merton interfered at times, and was occasionally their companion, thought Carry! Miss Merton was clever, and more suitable for Neal's society than she was—Neal did not mind leaving his wife, and spending his evenings in Crow Street. And they had been married only a little while,—what would it be in a year or two's time, she wondered, if she did not show a proper spirit now? Oh! this proper spirit!—how many of us have been led astray by it in our time!

Ada Merton came home almost immediately, and welcomed Carry, who received her courteously, but coldly.

"It is reversing the social order of things, Miss Merton, for the wife to fetch her husband home from *his* friends; but he keeps very late hours now," said Carry.

"I am ready," said Neal, rising.

Mr. Pike was embarrassed, and Ada looked from husband to wife with an intentness which vexed the latter still more.

"I have often pressed Mr. Galbraith to bring his wife with him," Ada said to Carry; "he forgets that he robs me of my uncle's attentions, and leaves me quite alone here."

"We are both neglected women, it seems," said Carry, a little scornfully.

"I am ready," Neal said again; and then after hasty adieux, husband and wife went homewards together.

In the dark streets Neal walked stolidly by his wife's side for awhile, her hand lightly resting on his arm. Neal broke silence at last.

"May I ask the reason, Carry, for this successful attempt at my humiliation?"

Carry did not answer until he had repeated this question once more.

"I do not see how I have humiliated you by *my* presence."

"No matter—what brought you to Mr. Pike's?"

"I was tired of home. I wished to see that you—you——"

"Were employing my time honestly, and not in bad faith to you," concluded Neal. "Well, are you satisfied?"

"I don't know," was the sharp answer.

"You found me deep in study of that which may benefit both you and me. What did you expect to find?"

"Nothing."

"You must have faith in me, Carry—faith in all I do and say. I am above suspicion," Neal added, sternly.

Sternness, we have more than once hinted, was the worst weapon with which to attack Carry—she had resisted sternness all her life, fought her fiercest battles against it, growing more obdurate in the contest.

"I am above threats, Sir," was her quick answer; "you must not attempt to frighten me. You have not been acting rightly by me, and I shall not sit still and sink into the slave."

"Have I treated you badly, then?"

"You are beginning to neglect me."

"For awhile—for a something that may greatly enrich us."

"Or ruin us."

"Ah, or ruin us. You are thinking of my father, and perhaps I have done wrong after all in following out his chimeras; but that is not to the purpose now. I have begun and shall go through with it—and the last thing in the world to stop me is the petty jealousy of one who should trust in me most of all."

"Petty jealousy! Who says that I am jealous?"

"We will not discuss that question."

"Does Pike's clever niece think so? If she——"

"She thinks nothing about you or me—it is not likely. Don't drag her name into the discussion."

"Oh! you are her champion, of course!"

"And you are her unreasonable assailant, as you are the assailant of my self-respect and your own. You come to Pike's house with the airs of a termagant fetching a sottish husband home from the beer-shop. I'll not have that occur again."

Neal had become stern and inflexible—it was the true nature of Neal rising to the surface. He was no more a hero than Carry was a heroine—and it is not the virtues of this couple that constitute our story-book.

"You will not," cried Carry.

"After my own fashion, I intend to have my own way," said Neal, very firmly. "It will not diminish my love for you in any one respect, but it will not seek to win your smiles by my own abasement. I cannot lower myself—I am too hard a man."

"Why did you not tell me this before I married you?"

"I did not see this scene!—I could not have believed in my wife, so soon after marriage, turning against me in her thoughts!"

"It is you that have turned against me," said Carry, with her lip quivering. "You are tired of me—I am sure of it."

"I am tired of this querulousness—it aggravates me," said Neal, more fiercely still.

"Then why speak to me?"

Neal did not respond. He was aggrieved, and he drifted into silence after Carry's last angry interrogative. His wife had lowered herself and him, and he was pained to think that she was not less a child. He must take the upper hand, and prove to her that it was not her duty to idly suspect him; without that, he could see many troubles impending over them both. He was a man who reasoned very deeply for his age, but his age had not seen one and twenty summers, and he had had no experience of a life like his own. Moreover, he had forgotten—if he ever truly knew—the key-note to Carry's better nature. He was inclined to resent the affront to his dignity even at the cost of a reconciliation that might have easily been made. He felt that he had been in the right, and that it was not his place to explain away a doubt, utter an apology, or attempt to soothe the feelings of one who had so readily mistrusted him.

Carry was a tender-hearted girl, but she was wild and wayward, and succumbing to her would but end in trouble for both of them. He must sacrifice his own yearnings for peace, for the sake of the lesson that it would be to his wife. It was her place to ask forgiveness, not his to rush with open arms to fold her to his heart. So Neal Galbraith, with the best motives in the world, made his first mistake.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED HAD SHE WAITED?

NEAL waited for the *amende honorable*, but it never came; Carry waited for kinder words, less evidence of marital dignity, but she waited, like her husband, in vain.

That visit to Crow Street became a thing of the past, which left a scar in its track. It became eventually too far away a reminiscence to talk about or wrangle over; but there never had ensued a satisfactory explanation, and there had resulted a "difference," which time did not seem likely to set right. For it was a difference unexplainable after a while; Neal was altered to a certain extent, and yet there was no opportunity of Carry demurring to the change.

The subject of the last altercation had been quietly dropped by both. Neal was kind, but grave; affectionate, perhaps, but not loving; stern in his business thoughts, which would absorb him more and more, thought Carry—take him still more away from home, despite that effort to stand her ground, which has been recorded in our preceding chapter. Carry felt that her effort had been wrongly directed, and would have confessed as much with a little pressing; but Neal held aloof from the subject, till it grew too late to rake over the ashes of an ugly retrospect.

When summer had come, Neal had grown more absorbed in his new scheme, but he seldom spoke of that scheme to Carry; and the young wife in morbid moments attributed his grave looks to regret at his rash marriage, to the cares of housekeeping, to anything but the right cause. Neal, despite his best efforts to remain his matter-of-fact self, had been borne along by the hopes of discovery; he had sunk that cleverness which had been his inheritance, and fancied himself content with pursuing a commonplace career, until the temptation, struck out by his sire, had confronted him. Then he had proceeded calmly and philosophically to work, until progress had lured him on, and the chances were on the side of success—thanks to that more clever brain of his father, by whose ideas Pike and he were endeavouring to profit.

Carry never asked a question concerning her husband's progress. Neal was not absent from home more than twice a week, but he was fond of working out abstruse calculations on paper when he was at home; and he had altered more than he was aware himself, if less so than Carry's imagination conjectured. It was a dull home enough for Carry; Neal felt that in time good fortune might brighten it, but Carry knew nothing of his hopes. There were the father and son, both working out their separate ideas now, as though Neal had caught his father's complaint; and Carry, if she desired company, had to seek the front parlour and Aunt Higgs.

To do Carry justice, she never complained. She kept her troubles to herself; she was making up her mind to bear all the ills that married life—unsympathetic married life—is heir to. If Neal were altering, she would complain only to him—and never to him without due cause. She should have cause enough, she feared, as the shadows deepened on her way. It was her misfortune to be unlucky all her life—if she had never been born, how much better it would have been for all parties!

One evening, in the summer-time, Neal suddenly leaped from the table and seized his father's arm.

"Come for a walk with me. You must come with me to Mr. Pike's house. Mr. Pike and I want your opinion upon something."

"But, my dear boy, where's the occasion for hurry?"

"We're in a mess, Pike and I. We have been working at the

cold-blast improvements, and have wandered from your idea into incomprehensibility. Come and set us right."

"I don't remember anything particular about cold-blast improvements. How long was it ago, Neal?"

Neal said that he would explain as they went along together; and father and son departed, the son asking Carry not to sit up for them, as they were likely to be late.

Carry looked after him wistfully, and Neal—the old Neal—came back and kissed her, saying—

"We shall be rid of all these fogs about us presently, I hope, Carry. These are dull times, for awhile."

"We can't have it all sunshine, Neal. I never married you in the hope of that."

Neal did not like the tone of voice which responded to his assurance.

"No—I suppose not," he said, and went out hastily.

Carry was in a despondent mood that evening, and disposed to take a gloomy view of things. Neal's new excitability was not pleasant to her—he was becoming cross, as well as morbid, now. Was it her turn to repent quietly at leisure, after so hasty a marriage as hers? Was life in Fife Street so great a contrast to life in Shepherd Street, after all?

Carry was sitting at the table, nursing her chin with her hand, and dwelling on all this, when her name was croaked behind her. Carry looked up hastily and cried "Mother!" Yes, the mother had stolen once more upon the scene—even such mothers as Mrs. Webber cannot keep long from the daughter.

She was a horrid old woman, though, and hastened to explain her presence there, after Carry had flown to her and kissed her.

"There, don't think I've come on purpose to see you," she said, huskily; "or that it's any pleasure to come after a gal that flew in the face of all duty, like her brother Joe did. I aint come for anythink of that sort."

"You are well, mother?"

"As well as can be expected at my time of life."

"And father?"

"Oh! he's well enough—he's always well," she answered; "you don't expect ever to see him again, I reckon?"

"No."

"He's as unforgiving a bit of brick as was ever lumped together; and you might as well talk to a nouse as him. I said so only yesterday—for he can't help me speaking *my* mind."

"No," agreed Carry, absently.

Mrs. Webber, without any good effect that was ostensible, had been speaking her mind all her life.

"He don't know I've come here—he wouldn't dream of my coming after you. He's comfortabler without his children, than he

ever was with them—it's his natur. But he don't come over me with his 'this shall be,' or 'shan't be.' I've a right to see you if I like."

"Well, I think you have, mother."

"Not that I do like much," was the ungracious addition here; "for you were a limb that wanted your own way in everythink, and, mercy on us, how obstinate you was! I've no business with you, after you threw me over, and let your brute of a father have only me to swear at. You might have took your share."

Mrs. Webber nodded her head at her ungrateful daughter. Carry could not restrain a smile at the selfish nature of this reproof; the mother's interest in her had already done her good, and the mother's querulous complaints assured her that she had not changed for the worse in marrying Neal Galbraith.

"Aunt Higgs says that you are happy enough—is that true?"

Carry was not inclined to trouble any one with her complaints. Yes, she was happy—that *was* true enough.

"It's more than you deserve, mind. Where's your husband gone this evening?"

"Out on business."

"That's a good excuse to be out on the loose," said the sardonic mother; "you must not believe all that a husband tells you. I should have liked to see him, and told him to say nothing to any one about my coming here."

"He will say nothing."

"He might meet Webber, and blurt it out; and Webber, when his blood's up—and it's all up in a fiz-like—wouldn't much mind jumping on me. Oh! the many years I've put up with that brute, Carry!"

Carry was accustomed to this style of her mother's—the old times seemed coming nearer, she thought, with a little shudder.

"There came a letter for you a week ago, and Webber told me to burn it, as there was no Miss Webber now; but I didn't, just to spite him. I kep' it back, and then I opened it and read it," she added coolly; "and then, after a time, I thought I'd bring it to you, and let you read it, and that's why I came here. Not on any account to see if you were well—although I'm not sorry to see you are, and to hear that you're happy, as *you* say."

Carry flinched at the emphasis her mother put on the pronoun.

"Who wrote the letter?"

"You'll never guess—you may be sorry it didn't come earlier, for women are strange critters. But you've been in a hurry, and must make the best of it. There's no turning back—I married in a hurry myself, and a precious fool I have always thought myself since! For there was nothing in your father—and I might have done much better at that time. I don't see very well how I could have done wus for myself—do you, Carry?"

"Father's rough at times—but you understand him better than all of us."

"I have been taught to know his little jokes," was her dry answer.

"And this letter?"

"Oh! here it is—perhaps you'd better keep it to yourself, or burn it. Husbands don't care about such letters as these turning up so quickly after marriage."

Mrs. Webber produced a letter from her pocket, and Carry, glancing at the superscription, changed colour just a little.

"From Mr. Tressider."

"Yes, a pretty game with the chaps you've been carrying on in your time, Miss."

"I cannot explain now—it's scarcely worth explanation. Long ago I did like him a little. You can see that by this letter."

"Yes, I can see that without spectacles."

"But that's all over—long ago that was all over. Has father seen this?"

"No, he thinks I burnt it."

"I will read it now."

"You might talk a bit to me, and tell me how you're getting on," grumbled Mrs. Webber; "you can read that—if it's worth reading—after I'm gone. I don't know why I brought it to you, except that I was curious to know who Tressider might be."

"He was my first love—a good-hearted, careless, reckless sort of man, with whom a girl like me could not venture to trust her happiness. He says that he is well, I hope?" said Carry, turning the letter over and over in her hands.

"You can see it all when I've gone away. I shan't stay long—Webber thinks I've come out for groceries. And so you're happy, Carry?"

"Yes—very."

Carry spoke out more boldly now; she was sure that she was happy, and without a wish to get back to Shepherd Street. And the mother was glad to receive that information, however stolidly she bore the intelligence; she had not been the best of mothers, but she was mother enough to miss her daughter, and to yearn for a sight of her again. She had been glad of an excuse to come to Fife Street.

She went away after awhile, and Carry opened the letter on the table, and proceeded to read it.

It may save time in description if we let Mr. Walter Tressider's letter speak for itself.

Star's Hotel, Liverpool, July 8th, 18—.

"DEAREST CARRY,

"Will you be very much surprised at a letter from me—at the manner in which I have begun this letter—at my boldness in

assuming that you are still 'dearest Carry' to me? I ignore the fact that we parted resolving not to think any more of each other, to forget that we were once dear to each other, to begin life afresh each for himself and herself, sinking the by-gones for ever. I don't like to think that we ever came to the resolution of forgetting a past wherein our hopes made us happy, and that I advised you, seemingly in cold blood, to think no more of me. I thought it was for the best, for I went away with a gloomy consciousness of remaining a scamp and a blackleg all my life. I set you free, believing that our engagement would but hamper your future. I professed to be glad of my freedom, in order that you might forget me more easily, acting for the first and last time like a hero. Well, the tide in my affairs has changed—I have met with good fortune—I am likely to be a successful man! Full of hope, I am coming back to London—I write in advance of my advent to beg you to forget our last meeting, to think that I love you more passionately than ever, to ask if you will let me look forward to making your whole future happy as my wife. Our tastes are similar, our chances of happiness are not vague ones—I am sanguine of a bright life for both of us. If there be no hope for me, do not answer this—if you forget with me that last bitter parting, write a line to me at Liverpool at once.

"Yours for ever affectionately,
"WALTER TRESSIDER."

Carry read this letter over twice, her cheek paling somewhat at its earnestness, at its sanguine nature, so characteristic of its writer when full of faith in his success. All had been over between them for some time; she could estimate his merits at their true value, and see the difference between him and her husband, but it was still a letter not to be coldly read or lightly set aside. This man was her first love—the hero of her girlish dreams; she had pictured many times life with him for ever. It had been a secret passion on both sides, and hers had burned more fiercely, perhaps; when he bade her think no more of him, she thought that her heart was broken. It was all over now, but it was a leaf from the old story thrown once more in her way, and she could only pore over it with tear-dimmed eyes.

Then came the thought—the ever-busy devil is a good prompter to such thoughts as these—of what would have happened had she waited? Would she have answered this letter with all her heart, and been more happy as Tressider's wife than quiet, matter-of-fact Neal's? Tressider was romantic like herself, and Neal held aloof from the poetry of life; Tressider was her first hero, her first love, whilst Neal she had fought hard to love—yes, she owned that—out of pity for his great affection, out of pity, too, for the desolateness of her own life.

What would have happened had she waited? She could not

shake the thought away—the room was empty of home-figures, and she peopled it with fantasies. The old prompter to whom we have just made allusion spoke up for her, and stirred her heart to its depths. She had been unhappy lately and Neal had not lightened her way. She had been unsettled, and he had not sought to calm her.

Tressider would have had no business apart from hers, or considered her mind too weak to enter into its details. He would have been a famous man, a great actor, some one whom the populace would rush to see—and his triumphs would have been hers, and she would have been doubly happy in sharing them. She had always loved the stage and stage-players—the unreal element before the footlights where real life is seldom pictured, and a caricature of it gains the greatest applause—she would have been happy with him, all her life; she had been too impulsive, and had marred with every step her better prospects.

Carry thought thus for a while—in the first whirl of her excitement engendered by that letter's perusal—then, like a brave woman with a heart well poised, she shook off the blight from her mind.

She thought of Neal's patience, perseverance, faith—the strength of mind which had pushed on to the goal, and the courage which had taken her for better for worse, knowing so little of her antecedents, and trusting in her from the first. She saw Tressider's vacillation, and Neal's straightforwardness, the tinsel adornments of the one, and the solid merits of the other—the weakness that gave way in distress, and the dogged courage that resisted the shock. One had been her first lover, but the other was her husband, whom she had not tried very hard to make happy lately.

"I wonder why I ever liked Tressider at all," thought Carry, in the first flush of the reaction; "he was always a child, with no will of his own. He will be unfortunate, and then sink down again, poor fellow! When Neal comes home, I must show him the letter—what will he think of it?"

But Neal and his father were long in coming home—longer than ordinary. Carry grew vexed with their stay, with their inconsiderateness in leaving her so long alone. Then rose the old grievance before her—Neal never studied the time when he was at Crow Street; he was not anxious to come home as he used to be; the figure of his wife, sitting up for him, red-eyed and lonely, never flitted before him to mar his rejoicing. It was all very well to talk of the model, and to hint at the good fortune in store for them in the days of success, but the good fortune never came, and the model and the experiments connected therewith were always motives for absence. And then that Ada Merton, who knew so much more than she did, and was so much more good and

tractable, thought Carry, with a hand that clenched itself upon the table.

Mrs. Higgs came up stairs to sit with her—to congratulate her on the evidence of her mother's affection; but Carry was too restless to appreciate the value of her aunt's company, and she was glad when Mrs. Higgs said good-night to her, and advised her not to sit up any longer.

Carry resisted all advice, and sat up till father and son came home—at a very late hour, the son gloomy and thoughtful, the father loquacious in the extreme. A slight acknowledgment of her existence, and then the old tiresome talk of the cold-blast.

"I'll have no more to do with it," said Neal; "I can see this idea—this chimera—begging Pike and me, distracting both of us from sober application to business. You have shown our mistake out clearly enough, and I am tired of uphill work."

"I think it's worth sticking to, at your leisure, Neal. You have wandered too far from the facts, and will have to return to them. You and I will go over all the old drawings to-morrow—Pike and you will never do without the old inventor helping you, after all."

"I was a fool to be led away from the path I had marked out for myself. I see that now."

Father and son went on talking thus together, and Carry resented her isolation.

"I think that you might have dismissed that tiresome subject with the night you have wasted over it, Neal," said she at last.

Neal looked towards her.

"Perhaps you are right enough. I am not good company when the cold-blast fit is on me, Carry."

"I have something to tell you."

"Oh! nothing new to-night, girl," said Neal, wearily; "tell me to-morrow. I am tired—unhappy—sorry for the time misspent chasing a fallacy."

"Very well—I will tell you to-morrow."

"It is nothing important?"

"Nothing," said Carry, trying to subdue all evidence of vexation.

"That's all right."

Neal dropped to sleep in his chair the instant afterwards, and the father looked at him sorrowfully—and with a strange intelligence for him.

"Poor Neal! He's right—he should not have begun to think of this—it's my old life beginning again, step by step."

"I hope not," whispered Carry.

"He has a stronger head than I ever had—he will fight through it, and do the family name credit, perhaps. God bless the boy! he's cleverer than that Pike! He's waking up to the right idea,

and if he's patient, he'll drop on it yet. But if he had not begun, it would have been so much the better for him!"

"Yes—I see that."

"It's a horrid thing to have one thought haunting you. It kills all else."

"It kills all happiness at home," said Carry, moodily.

"That is to be expected, my dear. Genius never finds happiness. Why, I didn't!"

Carry sat and watched her boy-husband some time before she awoke him, and reminded him of the lateness of the hour. And again, whilst she watched, the thought came to her from her evil counsellor—

"What would have happened had she waited?"

CHAPTER VII.

WALTER TRESSIDER CALLS AT CROW STREET.

MR. PIKE had given way to the love of invention equally as much as Neal Galbraith. His was a mind more evenly balanced, and his was a temper that took the obstacles in the way with greater composure than Neal's. He was a quiet, cold-blooded gentleman enough, possessed of a rare amount of patience, and a rarer amount of common sense; but the idea troubled him, too, not a little, for he wasted money—money for Addie—over it. Mr. Pike held fast, however, to the cold-blast idea. He was conscious of an approximation to his reward, and he had that rare faith in things turning out well, which is the one blessing that falls to inventors. He was not quite correct in his theories, but he would not give up the project yet awhile as hopeless. Now and then, as we have said, a spasm would cross him as he thought of all that he had expended in experiments, of how much money he had robbed from Ada, for whom he was saving carefully and diligently; but there was hope in advance of him yet, and with that hope was Ada's fortune. Mr. Pike did not think of his own aggrandisement, of any one who, in the future, might be dearer to him than his niece; this quiet being took little thought for himself, and put himself invariably on one side, as a matter of course.

Mr. Pike was inclined, like Neal, to become absorbed in his model, but Ada bore the distraction better than Neal's wife. She was not of a jealous temperament, and possessed the power of self-absorption in a great degree herself. She had been ever a busy little woman—an indefatigable chapel-goer, and worker in the service of her pastors and masters—much too good a character for

a novel ; but here she is, with all her virtues notwithstanding, and we hope, presently, that an honest failing or two will relieve her character from insipidity.

Mr. Pike was busy with his papers, then—deep in fresh calculations, and walking in and out of the room to his workshop at the back, where his furnace was in full flare that night. He had expected Neal that evening, but had given him up at last, and commenced working for himself.

It was striking eight when he came into the parlour again, very hot and flustered.

"The furnace is uncommonly obstinate to-night, Addie," he said. "If I were a profane man, I really think that I should swear a little."

"No nearer the great secret, uncle, then?"

"Not much nearer, at all events."

A rapid fantasia on the knocker occurred at this moment.

"Neal's knock," said Pike. "I'm glad of that. I had nearly given him up."

It was not Neal whom the small maid ushered into the room the instant afterwards, but a tall young man, into whose somewhat pale face Pike stared in amazement.

"Not—not Walter Tressider?"

"Ay! but it is!" said Walter, shaking him heartily by the hand. "Did you think that I had said good-bye to all good friends for ever? And Miss Merton, too," he said, turning to that young lady, who was regarding him wistfully from the other side of the room, "whom I have had the pleasure of seeing more than once before—or frightening more than once before. Which was it?"

"Frightening, perhaps—for you were wild, and melo-dramatic, and unreal!" was the quick answer.

"To be sure I was. But then my wild fit was on—and I fancied that I was going headlong to ruin. I was always a little extravagant."

"Yes," added Pike; "in more ways than one!"

"You will have to congratulate me now, Sir," said Tressider. "I'm a steady old file, saving money for a rainy day—which is the same as making hay whilst the sun shines."

"Yes—almost the same," said Pike, dubiously. "Sit down, Walter. Have you seen your uncle yet?"

"Not yet—I shall face him presently, though—I bear him no malice—I never bore malice in my life, Pike."

"That's true."

Walter Tressider sat down, drew off his gloves, produced a pocket-book, and then took therefrom two five-pound notes.

"Nine pounds, fifteen shillings—I said that I would pay you first of all of them; there's your money, with many thanks, Sir."

"Dear me, this is very remarkable!" ejaculated Pike; "then you really have been saving, Walter?"

"A little. Not much to *bounce* about at present."

"I am so glad—I really am so very glad!"

And Mr. Pike proceeded to shake Walter by the hands again.

"Perhaps you will come back to the old desk, and begin life afresh; many more like you—ah! and as wild as you—have turned away from the broad road at the eleventh hour, and become estimable members of society."

"Why, was I not always an estimable member of society?" cried Walter Tressider with a laugh; "what do you mean by that?"

"I'll not draw the picture of what you were, Walter."

"It wouldn't frighten me," said Walter, a little conceitedly; "I was never a *bad sort*. I helped my friends with my last sovereign, and lost a little faith in human nature when I found my friends disinclined to help me; but I did my best, after my own fashion—and in a queer fashion at times, why, it hurt no one but myself."

"I never thought that you were anything but a gay man—I did not consider you absolutely vicious."

"Thank you," said Walter, drily; "and can you tell me why I was not vicious?"

"The tracts I gave you, possibly?" suggested Pike.

"Hem!—not exactly. I was in love."

"Oh!"

"Really in love, Mr. Pike—even engaged to be married, till my common sense warned me of the trouble that I should bring to more than myself. Then I broke away from the spell like—a hero."

"You come back now to renew that engagement," said Mr. Pike, "well, it will do you good. It's honourable—it's the best thing that can happen to a young man to be engaged!"

"Hark at your uncle, Miss Merton," said Walter, who was in high spirits that evening; "what engagement has kept him steady, I wonder?"

"Perhaps I do not practise all that I preach," he said; "but the advice is good enough, for all that. Marry early and settle down to life's duties with an earnest resolve to do your best."

"I hope young Galbraith has profited by your advice, Mr. Pike?" said Tressider; "he's a steady young fellow, whom you have had all to yourself."

"Yes—he's very steady—a good, earnest young man. You will find him altered very much for the better since his marriage."

"Since his—what did you say?"

"Since his marriage, I said, Walter."

"Oh!—indeed!"

Walter Tressider let his hands drop to his side for a moment, then clasped them between his knees, as he sat facing Mr. Pike. From

the opposite side of the room, in the shadows of the evening stealing on apace in Crow Street, watched Mr. Pike's niece, more closely than Mr. Pike himself. Mr. Pike was not so keen an observer as Addie, and remarked no change in the demeanour of his visitor, who played his part well, and stood manfully against the shock which he knew then was coming against him with full force.

"Who's the—happy maid?" he asked, with affected carelessness.

He knew all then—he guessed all. Looking back to the time when he and Neal walked up and down the Southwark streets, and discoursed of each other's prospects, he remembered Neal's inquiries concerning Carry Webber; his own foolish, reckless advice to that youth, uttered in bitterness of spirit, and with a heavy heart. He thought himself a hero then to talk so coolly—now he felt himself a fool!

"He married a Miss Webber."

"I have—met the lady. So young Galbraith's married, then—well, it's jumping in a hurry at the responsibilities, and I—admire his pluck. How long is it ago?"

Pike told him, but he did not appear to pay much attention to the answer. He sat looking down at the floor, and clasping his hands still more tightly together—the face that had seemed bright and happy enough upon its entrance, had altered very much, or else the twilight deepened very rapidly in Crow Street.

Still he bore up well, for he aroused no suspicion in Mr. Pike's breast. He was to Mr. Pike the same Walter Tressider of old, only a trifle improved with the good luck that had come to him. But his heart was wrung, and not the less terribly for the want of preparation.

For this man had really loved Carry Webber, as well as he could love anything in life;—parting with her, giving her up in the face of an adversity that he could not ask her to share, he had been sorely tried; but to come back to talk of better times, and find how quickly she had taken him at his word, that was the hardest trial of all! If she had only waited but a short while, and not so readily have forgotten him;—if she could have borne with home a little longer for his sake! Well, it was all over; it was too late; it was like his luck! He had never been a lucky man;—he did not believe now that he should ever be a successful one; his was a mode of living dependent on the fashion of the hour, and as for what became of him, why, just that minute it did not matter in the least.

"What are you doing, may I ask again, Walter?" said Mr. Pike in louder tones.

It was the repetition of a previous question, to which Tressider had afforded no reply.

"What am I doing?—earning from eight to twelve pounds a week."

"Oh! dear—on the stage?"

"Yes. The stage answers pretty well, overstocked as it is by ambitious sucklings. I made a success of it in a small way, not in tragedy, but in comedy, and so against my inclination. But it pays as well as anything that I can expect—better than anything I deserve."

"It's a little derogatory, is it not?"

"I don't see it," said Walter, "and I don't care if it is. I shall not disgrace the time-honoured name of Tressider, however—to the world I am Theodore Raymond, late principal walking gentleman of all the out-of-the-way provincial houses."

Mr. Pike groaned.

"You are in the midst of temptation, Walter."

"I don't see that either. And I should not object if I were, for I like temptation. There's a novelty about it."

"Hush!—don't speak like that," said Addie, with excitement; "you are talking desperately, and don't know what you are saying."

"I beg your pardon," said Tressider, "I am reproved. No, perhaps I don't mean all that I say. I have come a long journey by rail, and the rattle, rattle of the train is in my ears still."

Another knock at the door at this juncture—Neal's knock this time. Neal Galbraith entered the moment afterwards, flushed and excited, as though he had been running.

"The old gentleman woke up this morning as bright as heaven, Mr. Pike!" he cried on entering; "he has been working all day at the new idea, and we'll essay the experiment whilst the conception's fresh upon him. Wish us all good luck, Miss Merton."

"With all my heart."

"I shall be glad when we have the subject off our minds for good, and the money in our pockets. Never another chase after discoveries whilst I live! What!—Tressider!"

Neal had run on very rapidly, taking but little notice of the new comer, and setting him down for one of "the Dissenting gang," as he irreverently called it, until his old fellow-clerk rose from his chair and faced him.

"Yes, Galbraith—the black sheep *redivivus*!"

They shook hands together, looking intently at each other meanwhile.

"You have altered very much, Galbraith. Why, you are ten years the older man," said Tressider.

"I have caught my father's disease early in life, and it's almost too much for my strength," said Neal in reply; "but the worst is over, and the world is brightening."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Thank you, Tressider. But my father—I had forgotten—he——"

"He is not here!" exclaimed Pike.

"Yes—he is here, full of a new variation to an old scheme; if a

failure this time we must give it up. My father is in the hall, arranging his papers."

"No, I have done that, Neal," said the old gentleman, who had been bowing at the door for several minutes, and who now entered the room, followed by the maid-servant with lights. "I have been standing there, and no one taking any notice of me, for some time. Who's this, did you say?"

The old gentleman crossed the room, and looked intently into Walter Tressider's face. The name of the old antagonist was fresh with him yet, and it was too late to remedy the error.

"This is a friend of mine," said Neal.

"You called him Tressider?"

"Well—yes."

"A friend of yours, then!—how can that be?" said the little man, looking back at his son fiercely. "Were they not the Tressiders who ruined us—who fought us from court to court, until my brain gave way? Whose force of money got the better of our honesty of purpose, and crushed us with its weight! I hate the name!—it overshadows ours, and ever will! It has been our ruin! What right have you to call a Tressider your friend, Neal?"

Neal was quick enough to seize the best method of explanation at hand. It had been an unlucky meeting, and had startled his father from his equanimity; but he must put, if possible, a better face upon it at once.

"The Tressiders, father, have been our friends for some time. When we were going to ruin, and there seemed no chance for you and me, a Tressider—the uncle of this gentleman—stepped forward, gave me a post of trust, and rendered us both independent of the world! Why, but for him, I do not know what would have become of you and me!"

Mr. Galbraith looked in a bewildered manner at his son; he dropped his papers on the carpet, and held his large forehead between his hands and stared.

"What Tressider was that, then?"

"The man who was not so bad at heart as you and I imagined, when we were fighting our hard battle with him."

"Wasn't he!—I know better than that! Good God! then it's that Tressider—the very man—who——"

"Who has been kind to me—paid me liberally for services of little value—and done his best to make me a good clerk."

"And you have kept this from me all this while!"

"You were very weak, Sir, when I first entered Mr. Tressider's employ. I have been waiting for the day when you should be stronger."

"Everybody treats me like a child!" moaned the old man; "and to think that a Galbraith should be servant to a Tressider! Why, it's not showing a proper spirit, lad!"

"That's an expensive luxury," said Neal, trying to turn the whole matter into a jest.

"I don't see anything to smile at," said Mr. Galbraith severely. "This is a hard day for me! I hate the Tressiders—I pray for their ruin every night, Neal!" he added in a husky whisper; "just as I pray for your advancement!"

"Good gracious, Sir!" ejaculated Mr. Pike, his hands flung aloft in horror; "pray for a fellow-creature's ruin!"

"He ruined me—he never cared for me—this man's uncle! Were he on his dying bed, I would not forgive him! Don't you know that we Galbraiths come of an unforgiving race?"

"I did not know that," responded Mr. Pike; "I'll not believe it."

He thought so afterwards—in the days stealing on towards him he could believe it in the son, as well as in the father.

"You and I, father, will have a long talk about this at a more fitting opportunity," said Neal. "We must not forget our new ideas in arguing upon what was right or wrong in my case."

"Oh! yes!" said Mr. Galbraith, picking up his papers, and darting a look of intense scorn at Walter Tressider; "we're sure to begin new ideas, and show the way to new discoveries, with a Tressider in the house. That's a more capital joke than the last, which you wanted me to laugh at!"

"Pray do not let me stand in the way!" said Tressider. "I have transacted all my business here, and will be going."

"When you are gone, I'll begin to think—not before," said Mr. Galbraith, determinately. "Neal, perhaps you had better see him out of the house, and along the street."

"Very well, Sir," said Neal, repressing a smile.

"My son thought of leaving me here to-night," said Mr. Galbraith, "and keeping his wife company at home. She is not very well. There has been just a little difference between her and me about——"

"I thought, Mr. Pike," said Neal, interposing here, "that you and my father might study the matter together to-night; and that my father might come home to-morrow morning by the 'bus. A long, quiet evening with him is our best chance, after all."

"But you——"

"And then you and I to-morrow, Mr. Pike, until we bring the gold to the bottom of the crucible."

"I shall be very happy to study with Mr. Galbraith," said Pike, "taking my lesson from the hands of one so famous."

Mr. Galbraith bowed and smirked at the compliment. He was coming round by degrees, and Mr. Pike's flattery—though it was simply the veneration of the tyro for the master—set him more at his ease.

"We shall succeed, if we're—we're only clear about the head"

said Mr. Galbraith, "and there's nobody near to worry us. That young woman will not mind going up stairs for a bit, I hope."

"Oh! no," said Addie, laughing.

"And you'll see, Neal, that that man don't slip away from you, and come back here. He's a Tressider—beware of him!"

"I'll take care of him, Sir."

"Don't encourage his acquaintance," continued Mr. Galbraith, without any concern for the feelings of the person alluded to; "he's of a bad stock, you know. Be always on your guard against him, and keep him from this house to-night, for we are going to succeed, Neal!"

"I hope so."

Neal and Walter Tressider prepared to depart. As they were passing from the room, Ada Merton touched our hero's arm, and drew him back a little.

"Are you two great friends?" she asked in a low tone.

"Not very great friends—why?"

"Because—for, for—your father's sake—I would not become intimate with him."

"Do you distrust this man, then?"

Ada thought for a moment, then answered fearlessly,

"No."

"I have always thought him a weak man, but only his own enemy," said Neal.

"He has come to-night to pay off an old debt; he is honourable, but for all that, he is not the friend whom you should choose."

"I shall make no friend of him, Miss Merton," said Neal. "I never make friends; I'm too hard a man."

Neal said it half in jest and half in earnest, for he half believed in his own sternness, now.

Walter Tressider and our hero went together into Crow Street. Tressider passed his arm through our hero's.

"It's like old times to come back again," said Tressider; "and though I don't return a happy man, and have received an awful shock to-night—I will tell you some day what it is—still I am glad to see you all."

"You come back with better fortune, Tressider. I am pleased to hear that."

"Yes, I have been lucky in my way. With perseverance, I shall turn out a successful mountebank."

He gave a brief sketch of his career to Neal—disguising nothing, and winning our hero to him by his openness.

"And you are married, Galbraith," he said at last; "you made your mind up very speedily, after our last meeting."

"Yes, she was unhappy at home, and I thought that, even with a small salary to begin life with, I could make her happy."

Did Neal think so now?—or was there, despite him, a ring of sadness in his tones?

"She is well, I hope?"

"You shall judge for yourself, Tressider."

"I—I am engaged this evening, I think," said Tressider, turning very red for an instant.

"You and Carry are old friends. She will be glad to see you and talk over the old times—it will be a change for her, for we keep very little company."

Walter Tressider did not respond. He walked on, and seemed counting his footsteps to himself.

"It will be your only chance, if my father stick to the Tressider antipathy," urged Neal, "and I will get you to talk of the plays, and cheer her up by the reminiscence. I have rather wearied her lately with my one theme, and feel just in the humour for a pleasant evening. I never remember being in such high spirits, Tressider."

"It's the forerunner of good fortune, Galbraith. I have felt the same myself."

"You'll come and spend an hour with us?"

"Thank you. I fancy that I should like to see Mrs. Galbraith for a little while!"



CHAPTER VIII.

TRESSIDER'S ORDEAL.

NEAL GALBRAITH was anxious to step out of the common track, and take Walter Tressider home to supper with him—anxious to vary the monotony of every-day life, by bringing back an old friend to Carry. There had been a faint difference that day—Mr. Galbraith, senior, had objected to any intrusion upon his studies, and been more than irritable over his plans; and when Neal had returned, he had monopolised all Neal's attention, until Carry had protested and given way—just a little! It had been hastily made up again, for Neal was in high spirits, and thought that he saw the beginning of the end of this new cold-blast scheme. Neal took his father off to Crow Street, to prosecute the researches before the furnace itself, promising to return early, and keep Carry company the rest of the evening—and the chance of bringing back an old friend with him was too good to be missed. Neal was not a distrustful man; he knew that there had been a leaning of a tender character in Tressider's heart towards Carry, perhaps a girlish affection of Carry for Tressider—but he had the good English notion that marriage cancelled all past likings, and he was above all fear of rivalry. He

had not given a thought to a rival: Carry was his wife, and there was an end to the story. Carry had liked him better than Tressider before marriage, or she would not have chosen him for a husband—and as for liking any one better afterwards, that might do for a French novel, but not in the real, pure life he had mapped out for Carry and himself.

In the future, with experiments off his mind, and his position better assured, Neal often thought how much happier he and Carry would be together! He was pained that Carry was not happier already—less prone to jealousy—less impulsive and inconsiderate; but in his heart he was sanguine of the brighter time. They were still a very young couple, he was aware; they had married in haste, and without a due appreciation of each other's character; for a matter-of-fact world, they had been a trifle too unreal. They had tried to settle down at once, without understanding each other, and it would have resulted in failure, had not his mind been stronger than his years. But he was steady and practical, he thought, and he could not become a slave to his affection, and grow childish in consequence. No one knew—not even Carry herself—how much he loved his young wife; how in the future he was always picturing forth her happiness with him, but hiding the view from her, lest something should step between them and disappoint her too keenly. She was sanguine enough at times, without his fancy picturing; let him appear content with the present, and settle down to it, rather than unsettle her by vain imaginings. She would become resigned then to the present, and the change for the better would ensue in due course, and he could tell her how he had hoped and worked for it.

He was sorely troubled at times to see how grave she had become—how reserved and thoughtful. Still Neal forgot himself in his schemes, and thought but little of her reproofs—for he was working for their advancement, and it was unjust of her to complain. If she was not content with the present, it seemed unkind to murmur at her struggles to make the future brighter—and only his love for her prevented him resenting it. He had begun to see that hers was a childish, fretful disposition which made troubles out of nothing; and yet he did not treat her like a child, and win her to him by his smiles. He played the master, and lost many chances; he was moulding her to his will he fancied, and, alas! he was only making her heart ache!

Possibly some dreamy idea of being on the wrong tack led him to press Walter Tressider to accompany him home. Carry had been low-spirited lately, and this old friend might help to give a turn to her thoughts. She and Tressider might speak of the old private-theatrical days—they would be reminiscences to laugh over again, and he could join in, and speak of his special mission to Richmond, and how he had brought about an anti-climax to "Othello." Tressider could tell them, too, of his new experience of life, and would be

excellent company—as he always had been from a child, for that matter.

They went home together to Fife Street, for reasons akin to these, then, and Walter Tressider and Carry met once more in life.

It was a meeting that startled Carry at the outset; she had not anticipated the old love suddenly emerging from the past into that front room; but she stood her ground well, and after an instant's embarrassment was the young hostess self-assured and calm. Mr. Tressider took a longer period to subside, for he had thought of Carry till a later day; only a little while ago he had written, believing her to be a single woman, and made her an offer of his hand again, reminding her—and the thought made him blush then—that he had kept true to her memory, and loved her better than ever. For a short while, it was an unpleasant sensation to think that she was Neal's wife, and that he had hopes of her being his until two hours ago; then the sober facts marshalled themselves before him, and he was once more Walter Tressider.

He would show husband and wife that he was a man to be trusted, doubtless they both knew the depth and extent of his folly, and pitied him for his weakness—but they could place confidence in him, and he was not one to fall in love with another man's wife.

It was the very evening that Neal had anticipated. After the awkward preliminaries had been got over, Tressider assumed his characteristic demeanour, and spoke of his success—such as it was—in life. Carry grew animated also; the old times drifted once more to the foreground, and the gossip upon stage heroics was a subject matter that made the hours fly.

"It is pleasant to come back and find oneself not quite alone in the world," said Tressider. "I hope that you will let me drop in now and then and see you both. I am a desolate old bachelor enough, and Fife Street will be a pleasant refuge from my morbidity."

"We must obtain the consent of my father, then, Tressider," said Neal, laughing.

"Leave him to me, and I'll try my persuasive vein," said Walter. "I shall be very dull after my success at the Thespian, and I shall have nowhere to go. Fancy a man in London without friends!"

"Where have the old ones gone, Tressider?"

"All vanished into thin air—and I do not care to grope in the mists after them. You don't know what a steady, matter-of-fact fellow I'm becoming. I'm to be trusted now—I am, indeed!"

He spoke almost beseechingly, as though there had been a time when no one had had faith in his steadiness. He turned to Carry, and she flinched a little at his earnestness.

"I never had a true male friend, Mrs. Galbraith—and that's why I grew reckless and improvident, and went to the bad. I should like to sober down for my credit's sake now. You cannot think

how I have changed, either of you. I paid half my debts to-day—and startled all my old creditors hugely. I shall be what Pike calls 'a burning light' presently."

"That's well!" said Neal.

"I took a fancy to you, Neal, long ago, but you would not have anything to do with me. Quite right then, old fellow—I own that."

"We shall be glad to see you here," said Neal, "when your engagements will allow of looking us up in the evening."

"Thank you—that is kind of you. That will keep me out of harm's way, and from you, ever steady and practical, I shall learn my lesson of dogged perseverance. Just for a time, till I break down again!"

"What's that?"

"I don't know—I'm not quite settled, after all. I always was a hare-brained scamp, whom nobody could trust. On second thoughts, I shan't come near you. What's the good of a fellow like me harassing you with my vagaries?"

He bade husband and wife good-night, and then came again into the room before Neal could follow him to the street-door.

"I wish you two could fancy that I'm a different Walter Tressider from this night. I could fall readily enough into the character, if you helped me. I want you both to trust me—to think that I am a good fellow, who would not hurt a hair of any other fellow's head. That impression with you two—that impression with me—and I *could* come here, and feel that it was a friend's house."

"It is an impression easily conveyed to us," said Neal, assuringly.

"Then, the past submerged for ever—it's a bargain. Why, Galbraith, I feel lighter at the thought. It's a bargain, Mrs. Galbraith," he said, turning to the wife.

"Yes," responded Carry, guessing all that he intended to convey, and thinking, perhaps, that it was best.

He went away light-hearted and excited—a man for Neal and his wife to wonder at after his departure.

"I can't make him out exactly," said Neal. "He's a good-hearted fellow enough—but, great Heaven, what a weak man!"

"Yes—he is weak," said Carry, thoughtfully.

"I don't see how a man like that can make much way in the world," mused Neal. "In his profession he must meet strange characters, who will render him their dupe, or lead him on to their follies. In good hands he might turn out a bright man—but in bad ones, Carry?"

"In bad hands he would descend to ruin."

"I would not have half his instability for the world."

"You are always firm, Neal," said Carry; "but are you any the happier for that?"

"Pushing on to one goal may lead to happiness, my girl."

"Ah!" sighed Carry, "yours is not a happy nature."

"Patience," he said, drawing her closer to his heart, "we shall see in good time. You don't quite understand me yet."

"I never shall. Oh! Neal," with a frightened look into his face, "I fear that I never shall."

"Yes, you will. Patience, Carry—and faith."

Carry was happy that night; Neal was at his best—the dawn of success was with him, and his heart was lighter; she saw her husband then as she had seen him before marriage, when his cares were fewer and there was more romance about him. She drew inwardly the comparison between the two men who had sat face to face together that night, and there was no sigh for that which was unalterable. God be thanked if the brighter days were coming in due course! She would not mar their advent by a word; she would say nothing even of Walter Tressider's last letter; it belonged to a past time, and Tressider had wished the past abjured. His manner implied that he withdrew that passionate appeal to her whom he believed still single, and Carry thought it best to let it float away down-stream with the other memories she was learning to outlive.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, Walter Tressider had walked slowly homewards, pondering on the incidents of the evening he had spent in Fife Street. He congratulated himself on the manner in which he had faced the old love; the cool and easy manner in which he had played his part that night. All his life had been spent in congratulating himself on a variety of achievements!

Only that night a bitter disappointment, and yet, before the night was over, facing her whom he had made up his mind to marry, and then found for ever set apart from him. He felt that it was for the best, and that Neal would make her a better husband than it would have ever lain in his power to do; but the disappointment was none the less bitter as he brooded over it in his homeward route. He had made up his mind to settle down, and now he was more unsettled than ever. What was the good of turning over a new leaf when the page beyond was blank and purposeless? What did it matter what became of him now? Then his variable nature leaped to a less morbid conclusion, and he thought that if he tried to settle down, and took a lesson from Neal Galbraith's patience, all would come right in time. He should forget Carry quickly enough—his love seemed to drop away like a cloak the moment he learned that she was married—she could never have cared much for him, or she would have waited longer, even after his formal resignation of her.

It was all over, and he was beginning life anew. He should be a

popular man amongst the frequenters of the Royal Thespian; he should fall in love again in good time, and sober down for good. He was content with the present even, and to show his contentment, he burst suddenly into tears, and turned up a dark court to hide them from the passers-by.

Yes, Walter Tressider was weak enough.

CHAPTER IX.

"FOUNDED ON FACT."

THE cold-blast principle, or the improvement on the cold-blast principle—we do not profess to clearly indicate the nature of Mr. Galbraith's discovery—made vast strides towards success after the last idea had been studied in Crow Street between Mr. Pike and the inventor. The two Galbraiths and Mr. Pike were in a fair way to see the end accomplished, in good time they thought.

Meanwhile, the business of Mr. Tressider, metal merchant, Shad Thames way, seemed to be stagnating, after its usual fashion; the orders were few; the deliveries of stock from Birmingham were fewer; there appeared no occasion for extra clerks, correspondence clerks, or anything; Mr. Tressider, senior, could have managed all the business himself, and found some time to spare, for that matter. Neal saw that an end must come to the firm in which he was employed, or else that it was a business more mysterious than even he had bargained for; and in the middle of August the end came, as foreseen.

Mr. Tressider, senior, issued from his counting-house one morning with two cheques in his hand, and laid one on Mr. Pike's desk, and the other on Neal's.

"There are your salaries to Michaelmas, gentlemen," he said coolly; "you need not come any more after next Saturday. We shut up for good, then."

"I did not expect this quite so suddenly, Mr. Tressider," said Pike.

"Oh! then you did expect it at some time or other?"

"Yes, Sir."

"It has been a good fight—I shall break up without owing any man a farthing, or being owed a farthing in my turn. And yet the world will always say what a scamp that Tressider was!"

"If we went on a little longer, perhaps——"

"Mr. Pike, the proverb says, when things are at their worst they must mend. I say, when things are at their worst they must smash!"

You, Mr. Galbraith"—turning sharply round on Neal—"don't seem disposed to say anything."

"I am very sorry, Sir, that misfortune has befallen you so suddenly."

"It was not suddenly; it has been coming on for years. All my life, I have been I poor man. You look surprised," he added, seeing that Neal betrayed astonishment at this; "but I am in no mood for explanation. You, Mr. Galbraith, are not disposed to idle time away?"

"No, Sir."

"Mr. Jennings is in want of a clerk, and will take you into his service next week. I have spoken a word for you in that quarter."

"You are very kind, Sir," said Neal, still more surprised at this evidence of interest in his progress.

"If Mr. Pike will take my advice, he will set up in business for himself."

"And you, Sir?" asked Pike.

"Oh! that's a matter of very little consequence," said the old man drily; "what becomes of old Tressider will not affect the world's composure. I shall go my own way, and take comfort from the surroundings. You know what a philosopher I am," he added with a sneer.

"If you——"

"Spare me any suggestions, Mr. Pike," said Mr. Tressider, with dignity; "I am master until the end of the week, remember. I shall not be greatly affected by the change of circumstance. I am prepared for the coolness of my friends and all the rebuffs incidental to my lower estate. Such things will amuse me—my faith in the earnest intentions of the world was never very great."

"No, Sir."

"Ah! you agree with me!" said Mr. Tressider. "Perhaps you have found it a bad world lately?"

"No, Sir," said Mr. Pike a second time, and with a different emphasis.

"There's nothing good in it," added Mr. Tressider. "I have no faith in it—I never had. Each one for himself, in this world; and woe betide the wight who is underfoot, and wants help! Each one fighting hard for his own interest, and crushing the life out of all opposed to him, if the power is in his hand. It's as bad a world as can be. I made that discovery when I was a boy."

When he was a stripling of nineteen, and his pretty cousin, to whom he was to be married, ran away with some one else she liked better than him, he might have added.

But he was not thinking of that *escapade*, and he never believed that it had given a turn to his character. He was a man who had always professed to be above excitement, and perhaps the effort

to maintain his composure had aged and hardened him before his time.

Neal had not been able to understand his employer; he had even made more than one attempt to keep all sympathy aloof from him. Neal was too good a business man not to perceive that things were going wrong with Mr. Tressider; and Mr. Tressider's stoicism under misfortune would have aroused his admiration, had he allowed it. But this man had been the means of his father's ruin—fighting an obstinate nature with its own weapon, and, by the very force of the resistance, hurling his father to the dust. He could not pity or admire such a man; and he shut his heart against him, and forgot all obligations.

Later in the day, Mr. Tressider appeared again in the office. The master was unsettled, despite his assumed equanimity; he had never been quite so near ruin before, and it was not pleasant even for a philosopher to contemplate.

He walked up and down the office with his hands in his pockets for a while, stopping at last before Neal's desk.

"What is your address, Mr. Galbraith?" he said suddenly.

"My address, Sir?"

"Yes. It is necessary that I should know it—that Mr. Jennings should know it."

Neal told him. There was no longer any occasion for secrecy.

"Your father, I presume, never became aware that a Montague was serving in the house of a Capulet?"

"Yes, Sir—by chance, a short while since."

"He was very much surprised, I suppose?"

"He could not comprehend my motives—sometimes I think that he has never forgiven me."

"He must be a queer old fellow," mused Mr. Tressider, as he recommenced his perambulations.

Neal was perplexed at his employer's eccentricity; he was sorry also for the downfall of the house, as a good servant is always sorry under similar circumstances. All that day he was full of thought—wondering what turn his own affairs would take, and whether Jennings would be likely to have him as clerk, on the mere recommendation of his employer? If not, how would the world treat him?—what would become of Carry, his father and him?

The next day, Mr. Pike watched his opportunity to speak to Mr. Tressider. He had been restless and fidgety all the morning until Mr. Tressider appeared.

"I have been looking over some papers of mine," he said, stammering and blushing; "and it has struck me that you—you wouldn't mind—just for once—reading a little paper written by my friend Mr. Hedger, a very worthy man. It is so applicable to your present case, Sir."

"Made to order, perhaps," said Mr. Tressider, taking the paper which Mr. Pike had extended to him. "What's this?—'Comfort, in the Hour of Tribulation.' My dear Sir, when will you leave off this ridiculous habit of tract distributing—I don't want any comfort.

'I exist within myself, not comfortless.'

He thrust the paper back into Mr. Pike's hands, and went into his room. Pike looked at Neal, and shook his head.

"It's very odd how people object to tracts, Neal. And there is no telling the good they effect."

"They have an unpleasant habit of dropping in at unseasonable times," said Neal; "and you are," he added, laughing at his companion's confusion, "a trifle too energetic with them. Fancy consoling Mr. Tressider with a tract, Sir!"

"I should like to console him, if I only knew the way," said this good-hearted, blundering being; "I have been a long time in his service, and he has never let me console him once."

The man who objected to consolation, even from his senior clerk, was to embarrass Neal before the week was out. This was on the Saturday, when Mr. Tressider, senior, entered no appearance all day, and the clerks left without bidding him good-bye in consequence. Neal had reached Fife Street in his homeward route, when the old master passed his arm through his.

"Good-evening, Mr. Galbraith," he said, quite cheerfully; "the worst is over—suspense is at an end, and I'm as light as a feather! Which is your house?"

"Mr. Tressider!" exclaimed Neal, "I did not expect to find you in this neighbourhood."

"It's within an easy distance of the Queen's Bench," said Mr. Tressider, "and the madhouse is at the back of the street, I find."

"This is grim jesting, Sir."

"I was always fond of my joke in a quiet way," observed Mr. Tressider; "now, where is this father of yours? I wish to see him."

"For what possible reason?"

"I have my reason—I think that it's a fair one."

Neal deliberated, then led the way to his house.

"I don't see any harm that can arise now—my father is a stronger man, and it may do him good to see you."

"To see me in adversity, and to know that I am no richer than he is," said Mr. Tressider sharply; "why, who's jesting grimly now?"

Neal coloured—the idea had struck him for an instant, and he had given voice to it. He saw that he had not spoken charitably,

and hastened to excuse himself, but Mr. Tressider evaded his apology.

"I am of your opinion too, and we'll turn jest to earnest," he said; "so this is your place?"

As they stood at the door, and whilst Neal sought for his latch-key, it might have been remarked that Mr. Tressider's philosophy was at fault. Mr. Tressider turned somewhat pale, and the lines in his face, for an instant, seemed to deepen.

"It's an odd freak to come here," he said, more to himself than to our hero; "I wonder what good I can do *now*?"

Neal opened the door, and went up stairs, followed by his strange companion. He hastened to prepare his father for the surprise, before his employer entered on the scene.

The old gentleman was at the table by the window, busy with pencil and paper—working briskly and even humming merrily over his work. Carry sat at the other window, with some needlework in her lap—she had been sitting there, watching for Neal's appearance.

"Father, a gentleman wishes to see you; and, I think, to express some regret for the trouble incurred by a long law-suit in which he was defendant. Am I right, Mr. Tressider?" turning to that gentleman, who had now entered the room.

"Thank you for my cue, Mr. Galbraith. Yes, quite right."

Mr. Galbraith, senior, put down his pencil, and leaned back in his chair, to stare at the intruder. Then his hands wandered to his temples in the old fashion, as though to steady his head to bear the shock of this surprise.

"So—so you're the man!"

"I have been making up my accounts—winding up all matters connected with business, Mr. Galbraith—doing my best to prove to the world that mine was an honest, genuine bit of ruin, without any humbug about it. My books will bear the light of day upon them—it was a steady run of ill luck, and nothing prospered with me. So I came to beggary."

"You beggared?—you, the Tressider who beggared me?"

"Yes."

"I'm very glad to hear it!" and the old gentleman drew his snuff-box from his pocket, and took a pinch therefrom with evident gusto.

"I thought that it would be pleasant news for you, and that I would bring it myself," was the caustic reply.

"You're very kind, I'm sure, Sir. Do you take snuff?"

"Thank you—now and then."

Mr. Tressider took the snuff-box extended to him and followed the example of Mr. Galbraith. Then he drew a chair close to the table, on which some plans were spread, and which were immediately whisked away from his sight, and passed the snuff-box back to his old antagonist.

"You have altered very much, Mr. Galbraith," said Tressider, "since you and I used to catch glimpses of each other in the law courts—what a tough fight it was between us!"

"Ah!—it was!"

"I dare say that I have preyed upon your mind for many years—been the one black thought which kept all light away, depressing you and yours!"

"That's true enough."

"Well, a man who has never studied sentiment in his life, or cared for anyone's opinion, comes here to-night to ask you to forgive him!"

Mr. Galbraith pushed his chair back a little from the table, and looked hard at the speaker.

"I surprise you!" added Mr. Tressider—"that is very natural, for I surprise myself. But I have retired from business, and all my business habits are put on the shelf along with my bad debts. I could have kept on two or three years more by borrowing large sums of money, and ruining others with myself. But I was methodical, and thought it preferable to beggar myself instead of my neighbours."

"You weren't so particular about begging people once."

"That was in the way of business."

"I know all about that, Sir," said Mr. Galbraith tersely.

"And now you see that that way did not lead to fortune—that my attempts to rob you of your patent did not put a penny in my purse—that I am getting an old man, and would be at peace with those whom I have injured directly or indirectly,—I will ask you to shake hands."

Neal stood surprised at this new side to his employer's character; he was a wondering witness to this interview, and still at a loss to assign a reason for it. Not the only witness either, for Carry leaned upon her husband's shoulder, and looked on with interest, and Walter Tressider appeared as if by magic at the open door, and was arrested by the sight of his uncle sitting opposite Mr. Galbraith, and offering him his withered hand.

Mr. Galbraith, senior, possibly did not appear in the best light that day, but he had been the injured man, and he was always hard to move. He buttoned his coat to his chin, and then pushed himself further away from Mr. Tressider.

"No, Sir—I shall not shake hands with you!" he said.

"I am sorry for that," replied Mr. Tressider—"it would have been an agreeable wind-up to my business life, and I could have begun afresh so nicely. Why, I have come three miles out of my way to tell you how sorry I was that the law-suit brought you to ruin."

"No matter, Sir. I shall make another fortune if I keep my wits," said the old man quite proudly; "when I am better off, I

may be disposed to think less seriously of all the harm that you have done me."

"You're very kind; but then your better thoughts will not avail me much. Now, they may."

"I won't shake hands!" said the old man, doggedly—"I can't forgive you. See what you have brought us to, and what a house this is to live in! You'll be able to understand what coming down in life is now."

"Possibly."

Mr. Tressider coolly began to draw on his right hand glove, a sign of the interview approaching a termination, and of his giving up all further attempts at reconciliation with his old opponent. Neal made one effort—he scarcely knew for what reason, for his heart had been full of bitterness for many years also—to close the scene amicably.

"Father, I think that it would be a kind and graceful act to shake hands with Mr. Tressider. He has been unfortunate."

"No—not even for you, Neal," and Mr. Galbraith, senior, thrust his hands in his pockets, as though suspicious of a dash being made at them, and himself taken unawares; "I'll say nothing more about my wrongs, or of the judgment this is to that bad man—but I won't shake hands for anybody!"

"Why, bygones are bygones!" said the cheery voice of Walter Tressider behind them; "what does it matter now?"

"Ah! are you here?" said his uncle, turning round; "what brings a second Tressider to this place?"

"Oh! I am an old friend of Neal's."

"And of Neal's wife—whose pardon I must beg for not addressing before," said Mr. Tressider, with a bow.

"The old firm has broken up then, Sir?" asked Walter.

"It has subsided," corrected Mr. Tressider. "There was no bankruptcy—and no one a loser by me. I went on to my last shilling, and then wound up voluntarily."

"And you, uncle—what will you do?"

"I begin afresh to-morrow."

"If I can be of any help——"

"Help yourself—don't forget that motto—it's a grand one."

After thus checking his nephew's offer of assistance, he again faced Mr. Galbraith, as though loth to part with him.

"I have one little light to throw upon our old battles, Mr. Galbraith," said Mr. Tressider; "I should not like to begin afresh without imparting to you that information. I have been a poor man all my life, and did not ruin you alone. It was a trade necessity to keep you down."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Mr. Galbraith.

"It was not a noble scheme of ours," said Mr. Tressider; "but when you refused all terms but unconditional surrender, a few of

us met together, at the suggestion of a Mr. Jennings, and resolved to fight it out, court after court, until we *finished* you. You wanted me for an example, and it seemed the cheapest way to make one, for I was not a great man in the trade; but then the trade backed me with all its force, upheld the wrong against the right, putting its gigantic wealth against your petty independence."

"This was conspiracy!" cried Neal.

"A conspiracy hard to prove, but acted very often, and in more trades than ours. Bless your soul, Sir, it is a common plan to put down obtrusive inventors, who want the lion's share of profit. It deserves hanging, perhaps—I thought so myself, when the action had begun—when I was the scapegoat, and you were the victim—but I could not break away from the compact, and my share of the expenses was quite sufficient to bring about my ruin."

"I'm glad of that," cried Mr. Galbraith.

"You have said so before, if you remember," was the cool reminder; "when we got the case to the House of Lords, you gave up and went mad, or something—and we had it all our own way. We were rather sorry for the climax, and when your letter first came to me," he said to Neal, "it was understood that you and your family were to be protected by us in a paternal manner, for ever afterwards. The trade paid your salary, Mr. Galbraith," turning to Neal; "not I."

"The trade offers me a clerkship at Jennings's?"

"Yes."

"I will starve before I take it!"

"Ah! you'll think better of that; it's no good flying into the heroics—it never answers. I have attempted sentiment to-night, but you see it don't pay. I think that I will go now."

He moved towards the door, and looked back at Galbraith the Inventor.

"You'll not shake hands, then?"

"Certainly not."

"I dare say my last explanation has made matters worse," added Mr. Tressider; "but I did not like to bear all the blame, especially as my wish was to clear up everything. Good-day."

"Where are you going now, Sir?" asked his nephew.

"To finish work, lad. Don't stop up the doorway—you were always in somebody's way, Walter."

"You spoke a little while ago of your last shilling," said Walter; "and hang it! one Tressider should help another."

"Did I ever help you?"

"Many times, Sir; and if a little ungraciously, still I see the reason for it now."

"Ah! you were always wonderfully clear-sighted," said Mr. Tressider; "come round to-morrow to Shad Thames and tell me of your last success, Walter. That will be a change at least."

He stretched his hand out to his nephew, and held it a moment in his own before relinquishing it; then he shook hands with Neal and his young wife.

"Good-evening to all of you. And you," turning to Mr. Galbraith, senior, once more, "you will not, then?"

"Never, Sir!"

Mr. Tressider heaved quite a sigh at the obduracy of his antagonist, as he went out of the room. Walter followed him, and Mr. Tressider called from the lower stairs:

"Don't come. I have to finish up to-night, and shall be busy. Any time to-morrow, Walter."

"I must be of help to you, Sir—remember that."

"You are very kind—but remember what I said before, young prodigal!"

Mr. Tressider went back to Shad Thames—to his deserted office, where business was over for good. He opened the little wicket in the great warehouse gates, and locked it behind him. Then, after walking about the yard for some time, and looking up at his warehouse—empty and desolate as his heart—he went into the counting-house, arranged some books methodically on the shelves behind the desks, muttered something about Pike and Neal not finishing off properly, and then passed into his own room, and turned the key for ever on his life!

BOOK IV.

A LIFE'S MISTAKE.

CHAPTER I.

CARRY'S RELATIONS.

NEAL GALBRAITH kept his word, and entered not into Mr. Jennings's service. The last story that ever escaped Mr. Tressider's lips hindered him from seeking that position which he had been assured awaited him.

Neal's common sense would have got the better of his pride again, had the force of circumstances impelled him to self-abnegation; but he and Mr. Pike were hovering on the brink of a discovery, and it might set them above all clerkships. They were both quiet, careful men, however, and did not care to live on that hope; both knew the dangers of discovery, and the difficulties in the way of success. They were content to work patiently, but not to sacrifice all their time in working for that which might end in illusion.

"Poor Mr. Tressider suggested that I should set up in business for myself," said Mr. Pike to our hero; "but I haven't saved much money, and I should not like to lose it, and leave Addie penniless. I'll go round to some of the old customers, however, and see if they feel disposed to support me. You would not mind being my clerk, Neal—in the good time my partner?"

"If you think that I am worth taking into your service, Mr. Pike, I should like to be your righthand man!"

"I wish you with me, of course—I can see after you then!"

Neal smiled at Mr. Pike's paternal solicitude.

"You'll not be twenty-one till the autumn, for all that old-looking face of yours. It's no good considering yourself a man yet."

"Just as you like, Sir," said Neal.

Mr. Pike went round to the old customers, held a conference with some banking friends, who were fortunately Dissenters and members of his particular sect, studied the dangers and difficulties in his way, and finally started in business for himself, retaining Neal Galbraith as his clerk.

Mr. Pike was well-supported, and began well. After the first two months, he said to Neal:

"We shall get over the quicksands in two years. In two years' time we'll talk about a partnership, Neal."

"What can I bring into the firm as my share?" said Neal, ruefully.

"Honesty and perseverance—first-rate things!" replied Pike. "What a lift it would give us in the world, though, if we could manage to work out your father's idea?"

They were still working at it—approaching the end, or receding from it—daunted now and then by the difficulties in the way of the experiments, but never wholly giving up. There were times when Pike would sigh still over the expense—he was always a careful man—and Neal and he would confer together on the advisability of sinking the project; but after that the inventor's fever set in, and both became restless and anxious once more.

Carry continued far from satisfied with the cold-blast—that long, long study, from which seemed to evolve much gloom to Neal, and many solitary evenings to her. She did not think that she was jealous of Addie Merton now—jealous woman as Carry was; but her husband's frequent visits to Crow Street vexed her more than she cared to confess. She was jealous of his time spent away from her—of that which seemed to her a something very like indifference to her society. She resented all this in her heart—she grieved over it, but she had resolved, if possible, to complain no more, for Neal's sternness on that night wherein she had faced him in Crow Street was with her still a cruel memory.

When Neal was at home, Walter Tressider called, and spent an hour with them; in the early part of the evening, before his services were required at the Thespian. He was not such agreeable company as he used to be, and his uncle's death appeared for a while to have sobered him. Mr. Galbraith, senior, bore with his presence for Neal's sake, but he no more "took" to the nephew than he had taken to the uncle, and he sat glowering over his plans at the intruder. Mr. Galbraith's mind was becoming more strong; but his amiability and docility seemed making rapid retrogression. Carry sometimes thought that it was a great pity that Mr. Galbraith had not remained mad all his life, although she did not express that opinion to Neal.

Still they were pleasant evenings when Neal was at home, and Walter Tressider looked in. They varied the monotony of existence, and Tressider seemed grateful for the home which was open to him. He was a man strangely isolated—and more than that, a man strangely changed. When his uncle's death was three months old, he came more often to Fife Street, apologising always for his intrusion, and paying an attention to Neal that was almost deferential.

"Tell me when you're tired of my visits here, and I'll keep away," he said once; "but I really have nowhere else I care to go—I'm getting a downright misanthrope, Galbraith."

"Shake off that feeling, Tressider," Neal would say; "you must not bring the horrors into company."

Tressider would brighten up under the influence of his friends, after awhile; and the last hour he spent with them was always his brightest and best.

"I don't know what to make of him," Neal remarked to his wife, after one of these visits; "he must have something on his mind, I think."

Carry thought so too. She wondered at times if *she* troubled his mind, and whether it were the morbid desire to see her and be near her that brought him so frequently to Fife Street. She had a suspicion that it was, and there was a faint pleasure—born of the one romance that had died with her marriage—in the fancy. Yet she had not one thought antagonistic to her wifely duty; she was a woman born to be dissatisfied in life—there are a few like her in the world—but she had no foolish ideas of making a hero out of Walter Tressider. She saw that he was a poor, weak, ne'er-do-well—and if he loved her still, she could pity him, although it was not right that he should come there.

Scarcely right; she would consider the matter more seriously, and then give Neal her opinion. Neal, full of his own projects, and with but little consideration for her, she thought, walked on blind to the signs upon the surface, and formed no opinion of his own. Did she take his perfect confidence for indifference, and think herself neglected?

Carry was troubled with these thoughts one day early in the new year—she was nineteen, and Neal was twenty-one, then—and was brooding over them, with Mr. Galbraith at his eternal plans in the corner, when Mrs. Higgs burst into the room.

"Oh! good lor, Carry!—here's such a 'prise for you!"

"What is it?" asked Carry.

"Here's visitors to see you—what shall I do with 'em?"

"Show them up stairs, to be sure."

"I'm very busy just now," muttered Mr. Galbraith, without looking up; "if everybody lets me be quiet, I shall catch that idea at last, and it has worried my boy quite long enough."

"Who are they?" asked Carry, impatiently.

"It's Joe and his wife."

"Come to London again!" said Carry, her heart leaping at the novelty of meeting two who had at least been kind to her, and her dignity a little upset by the uncalled-for hint of Mr. Galbraith; "oh! how glad I shall be to see them!"

"But——"

"Joe's my brother, and he has always been my friend. Do you think that I am ashamed of him, aunt—or that I gave him up when I married Neal?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Higgs, gravely regarding her, "I never said so—you needn't be so 'pirited about it."

Carry ran down stairs to welcome Joe and his wife—presently

returned, ushering in that gentleman, behind whom loomed the gigantic proportions of Mrs. Webber.

Mr. Galbraith quite jumped at the sight of the strange lady, rose for an instant at the hasty introduction of Carry's relations to him, sat down and stared and sighed. Oh! dear! what strange relations Neal had brought round him by his marriage!

"Hope your well, gov'nor!" said Joe, nodding familiarly to Mr. Galbraith; "and that we're not putting you out much by dropping in like this!"

"N-no—oh! no!" replied Mr. Galbraith, after a little consideration.

"You can't say we come too often—we're perfectly aware that we're a cut beneath Carry and her new connections, but we thought she wouldn't mind us looking in, for once."

"Mind, Joe!—I am very glad to see you!"

"And the Investment too, I hope," with a flourish of his hand towards his wife.

"My old friend—to be sure!"

Selina, pleased at her reception, folded her long arms round Mrs. Galbraith, and blessed her in a subdued voice. Then she sat down by the side of Joe, and Mrs. Higgs came in, as one of the family, and closed the door behind her.

Joe was not quite so disreputable as usual; his clothes had seen service, but were free from damage; and the pair of high-lows, which he somewhat ostentatiously displayed, had only that morning been resoled. As for the giantess, she had taken the show-muslin for every-day wear, as she communicated to Carry before the interview was over; and Joe had purchased for her public wear, from a wardrobe in Oakley Street, Lambeth, a green silk skirt, a crimson body, and a white lace trimming.

"With a deep flounce, when we can afford it, it'll be a splendid fit, my dear."

Joe was magniloquent over his rise in life.

"I always made up my mind to keep away until I was presentable," said Joe. "I could tell that Neal wouldn't care to see us trooping in, for the sake of a dinner or a tea. When we wanted that sort of thing we kept away; but we've had a stroke of luck—Toppin's Circus has engaged us for twelve months; and Selina and I are going round the country. I do the jumping through the hoops now, and uncommon good exercise it is!"

Carry sighed; and Joe added—

"It's not much to brag about—but it's an honest living."

"And it keeps Joe pretty straight," said Selina; "for if he takes too much before his turn comes on, he's likely to break his neck, and so that makes him careful."

"And afterwards Selina takes care of me—and the money."

"When I have a chance," Selina added with a sigh.

"To think that my family 'nections should have come to this!" ejaculated Mrs. Higgs; "and you might have been so 'spectable, Joe!"

"Yes. I know all that, Aunt Higgs," replied Joe, easily. "I tried very hard once or twice the respectable dodge, but something always got in the way. And, after all, I don't know that I'm any the worse. Since my marriage, Selina has managed me, you see."

"That's your duty, Marm," said Mrs. Higgs, looking up at her.

Selina Webber crossed her rusty gloves together, and held her head a little higher, to give emphasis to her reply.

"I does my duty by him, Mrs. Higgs. I shouldn't have left a good home and carawan for him, if I hadn't made up my mind to that."

"I suppose we shall see Mr. Neal?" asked Joe.

"He will be back presently," said Carry; "are you pressed for time?"

"Oh! no—we think of spending the evening with you, for once—if," he added, hesitating, "we're not much in the way."

"I'm very glad to think you have remembered us, Joe."

"Thankee for saying so," Joe replied; "and we're not in the way of the guv'nor here?"

Mr. Galbraith did not reply this time. He continued to sit and stare at the intruders; to feel bewildered by that long, thin woman, with the detestable bonnet.

Carry responded.

"You're in no one's way, when I say that you are welcome," she answered, with a meaning glance at her father-in-law; "we will have the wife's relations to-night for a change."

She laughed a little spasmodically, for she was hurt at Mr. Galbraith's silence; but Joe took her answer for a good joke, and her brother indulged in a little falsetto laugh that curdled every drop of blood in Mr. Galbraith's body. They settled down for the evening then; Carry produced a half-bottle of sherry and a bottle of brandy from the cellaret, her entire stock of alcoholic compounds; and Selina took off her bonnet, and, at the suggestion of her husband, who was full of observation that evening, "smoothed her hair a bit."

It was an odd assemblage in that drawing-room, and would have startled stronger minds than Mr. Galbraith's. But Carry was used to Joe; she pitied his position and moral weakness, and had in her time helped him against the stern father who had turned him out of doors. Between Joe and Carry had ever been no small affection—amidst the bustle of a life which had known much temptation, and been lowered to its dregs by poverty and drink, Joe bore Carry ever in kind remembrance. What little good there was in him, or what attribute of a higher nature there was left to him, was Carry's doing, and after a fashion he was grateful for it. Joe would have shared

his one glass of gin with his wife—for his was not a selfish disposition—but he would have given it all to Carry, had she asked for it, no matter his intensity of thirst. Can we prove more completely than this that there was some good in Joe?

Four out of the five occupants of that little room speedily forgot the incongruous elements of the company, for they were members of one family, with a hope or two in common. Mrs. Higgs, naturally of a loquacious turn, launched herself into the subject, and talked volumes of good advice to Joe—recommending patience, industry, and sobriety, and trying, with her usual rapidity of utterance, to picture the good result that would follow in consequence. Joe nodded his head complacently, and agreed with everything. He was aware that he had been a rogue and a vagabond all his life—that was right enough!—that he had resisted the hardness of his father by improper ways, and gone wrong all the more for the attempt to keep him straight—that he would have broken the hearts of parents made of stuff less durable—it was all true, he did not care to utter one excuse for it. As for keeping steady now, why, the horsemanship would do that for him—he wasn't going to risk *his* life for anybody! Aunt Higgs couldn't give it him worse than he deserved; meanwhile let him make free with Neal Galbraith's brandy, for it was good stuff—he hadn't to pay for it, and the Circus did not want him that night.

Joe thoroughly enjoyed himself, and when Carry, anxious to make him comfortable in every respect, answered "No" to his hope that tobacco-smoke was not objected to, Joe was happy with his short clay-pipe, whence were presently emitted the most villanous fumes.

Mr. Galbraith took offence at all this, very unwisely. He did not like the even tenor of his way disturbed, and could not put up with it complacently. He feigned to be absorbed in his plans, but fidgeted idly with his pencil; he refused to come to the fire, or make one of the "social circle," as kindly suggested by Joe; he glanced askance at them now and then, and thought that it would have been more right for Mrs. Higgs to intimate the lateness of the hour, than to sit there chattering about the Webber family; and he wondered how much brandy would be left for him—and it was bought for him, and kept expressly for him when his spirits were low—if that fellow they called Joe kept tilting it into his glass at that rate!

The last thought also perplexed Mrs. Webber, who knew Joe's foible. She wished Joe to be presentable to the last, and not leave an ugly retrospect in Fife Street; but Joe was full of anecdote, and that rendered stimulant necessary, and Carry and he laughed a great deal at the times when they were boy and girl together.

In the midst of this, Neal Galbraith came home, and burst into a fit of coughing as he intruded heedlessly into his smoke-filled drawing-room. He had entered with his latch-key, and ascended the

stairs full of thought concerning his cold-blast scheme—he and Pike had gone further away than ever from a good result that night!—and the sudden change of scene first bewildered and then choked him.

He recovered his composure in a minute or two, and after a struggle with his breath. Through the smoky atmosphere he recognised the sallow face of Joe, the tall form of Joe's Investment, Mrs. Higgs, and his wife, the latter looking into his face a little nervously. That Neal was very glad to come upon his relations in this fashion, and to find the drunkard at his fireside, taking the lead in conversation, is scarcely natural to expect; but he was not aggrieved, and he felt already that this was part of his bargain when he married Carry. A thing not to be helped at times, and at which he had no right to complain; he had tact enough to make the best of it, and to sink, with graceful readiness, into the host.

"This is an agreeable surprise," he even ventured to say, as he shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Webber. "I hope that you have been doing well since we met last?"

"Pretty well," said Joe, and he launched into the subject of his rise in life with a volubility and a thickness of utterance that very speedily betrayed where the brandy had gone. Neal listened, after a glance and a nod towards his father, and in due course congratulated Joe on his better prospects, and at Joe's kind invitation even mixed himself some cold brandy and water to drink Joe's health with.

"You're looking a bit worried like, Sir," said the giantess, after a sip at her sherry. "I hope business is going on well?"

"Very well, thank you."

"Businesses must be a drefful worry," she continued; "not to mention housekeeping—for to live in such style as this must cost a sight of money—two pound a week, perhaps?"

As one of the family, Selina Webber waited for her answer; she saw no reason to keep anything back herself, and she was a woman who expected confidence in return. But Joe dropped in here and diverted the conversation.

"The old gal's right enough—you're not looking quite the thing, Neal. You're paler than you used to be. I s'pose you and Carry jog on together all right?"

"Yes," said Neal.

"Carry used to be a devil of a temper," said Joe, gravely shaking his head at his sister. "I could manage her sometimes, nobody else. But then I got over her with giving her her own way—which is a wrinkle for you, young Sir."

Joe's wife laughed at this, and Joe laughed also, evidently conscious of, having said a good thing. He looked across the room to see if Mr. Galbraith senior were laughing, and then, disgusted

with the stolid glare in Mr. Galbraith's eye, he turned his back upon him. Joe's dignity had been a trifle outraged by the want of sociability evinced by Mr. Galbraith, and that last slight hurt Joe's feelings.

"And there'll be the worry of a family presently, perhaps," whispered the giantess to Carry. "When's that likely to be, my dear?"

"Hush!" said Carry, blushing; "not for months yet. I don't know—I'm not sure. I haven't said anything to Neal. Pray don't!"

Mrs. Higgs did not hear this flying interchange of whispered words—she had been watchful of her nephew's actions during the last hour, and was anxious that he should go before he disgraced the family. She had been watchful of Mr. Galbraith, senior, also, and had become at last mindful of his uneasiness. But Joe was not disposed to attend to Mrs. Higgs's hints; he had found a friend, he said—he and Neal had always been the best of friends, and no men esteemed each other more than they did. He hoped Neal, whenever he was travelling in the neighbourhood of Toppin's Circus, would drop in and see him jump through the hoops; he would be always glad to shake Neal by the hand, and make him welcome in every way in his power. The Circus would be at Woolwich to-morrow, and if Neal would like any orders, why, he had only to say so.

Neal would be busy to-morrow, and therefore was compelled to decline Joe's kindness. The brandy was out of the bottle now, and Mrs. Webber was putting on her bonnet. It had been a pleasant evening, marred a little by Joe's weakness. Carry was sorry for that, and wished that she had put out less brandy; but Joe did not come often, and she had done her best to make him welcome. She was a little ashamed of him when he stood up at last, and swayed unsteadily, but she watched jealously for any evidence of Neal being ashamed of *her* brother!

"I should have spent a jollier evening had you turned up earlier," said Joe, by way of concluding remark; "but I'm glad to have seen you at last, and looking so well, too! Upon my soul, I never saw you looking better, Neal! Good-bye, old fellow, and God bless you! You'll take care of Carry, won't you? She's a good sort! Till I speculated in Selina—Sally's her right name, you know—I hadn't a woman in the world to care for me but Carry—you'd scarce-ly credit it!"

"It's very late, Joe," remarked the lady in whom he had speculated.

"All right, my love—I'm ready. Good-night, aunt—I shall take to heart all your good advice—I never was a man who kicked at my advisers—not I! And good-night to you, old Ironchops," he said, verging suddenly on the personal, as he faced Neal's father; "con-

sidering our relationship, you might have been a trifle more polite, without busting yourself over it!"

"Joe!—Joe!" reprimanded Carry, seizing him by his arm, and leading him from the room.

The giantess and Mrs. Higgs followed, leaving Neal and his father together. Neal drew a chair to the fireside, and sat down before it, with his hands clasped, and his dark eyes staring at the flame.

He was deep in thought, when his father touched him on the shoulder.

"I would not let this trouble me, Neal."

"I can't help it."

Carry came back for the clay pipe which Joe had left upon the table, and had insisted upon being fetched for him. She stood for an instant aghast at the door, listening to those words, then snatched the pipe from the table, and went out of the room. Neal had not observed her, but Mr. Galbraith had seen her enter and depart, and had held his peace until she closed the door again.

"You should have thought of this before—but you were hasty, and you never asked for my advice."

"What are you talking about?" said Neal, looking up.

"About these vulgar people com—com—coming here in droves, and drinking all the brandy!"

"I was not thinking of them," replied Neal; "they are not often intruders here, and it is not merciful to turn our backs upon our poor relations. I was thinking of our plan."

"What of it?"

"I am weary of it, and yet I cannot break away from it," said Neal; "night and day ever in my thoughts, aging and bewildering me—robbing me of time, money, and sleep, and advancing no nearer to success. I should have taken warning long ago!"

"But we are getting on. We were never closer to the goal, Neal. I—I shall be able presently to see it still more plainly," he said exultantly; "men of genius like ourselves must not give up—I never gave up an idea when I was young!"

"Better for you and me if you had, father."

"Don't speak of that time—we may retrieve all yet. Why, this is a grand discovery—I really believe if that—that blackguard and his wife had not come to-night, I should have seen it all, from beginning to end, like a book."

Carry had entered the room again, unobserved this time. Neal was still bending forwards, looking at the fire, with his father standing by him. They were still regretting the visit of her friends to that house, and resenting it as an intrusion on their gentility, thought Carry. And Neal, her husband, could quietly sit there, and let his wife's family be thus vituperated. Joe had not shone brilliantly that evening—Joe *was* a blackguard, perhaps, although

she had never had the heart to think so badly of him—but it was not Mr. Galbraith's place to resent her brother's coming in so harsh a manner. Her brother through it all, and one to be defended at all hazards.

"What blackguard are you speaking about, Mr. Galbraith?" Carry suddenly demanded.

Mr. Galbraith jumped a little at the question, but he had been irritated all the evening, and Carry's tone of voice irritated him more.

"That man who calls himself your brother—he—he shouldn't have come here!"

"He has been unfortunate!" cried Carry; "bad counsellors, want of moral strength, need for kindly help, when want of help was ruin to him, have brought him low enough; but I must not have him spoken ill of. It is not your place, and I will not bear it!"

"Patience!—silence!" said Neal, aroused now from his reverie.

"And you to take his coming as a trouble!" cried Carry, still vehemently; "he who has not seen you since our marriage, or begged one favour of you!"

"I have not said a word," answered Neal; "you are not just."

"Oh! I am always in the wrong," said Carry; "you will always side with your father against me. Never one word in my defence, but always prepared to enact the champion for him, and side with him against me. What right have you to complain?" turning to Mr. Galbraith again; "because my brother comes here—have I ever said a word against your being an intruder in my home? You are my husband's father, and I respected you till now—but you abuse your place in this house, and I will not endure it!"

"God bless me!—God bless me!" muttered old Mr. Galbraith twice.

He could not stand against a violent attack—he was never likely to be wholly strong again, and Carry's angry words swept away all his resistance, his querulous complaints. He saw his danger then; the enemy that he was making of his son's wife by his foolish opposition, and he was afraid. He sank into a chair, and cowered from her, as he had cowered from his keeper, when his mind gave way, three or four years since.

"Neal—Neal!" he whimpered, "you'll help me—won't you? You'll not let her go on like this!"

"Carry!" cried Neal, "for shame!"

Carry recoiled at Neal's reproof, and then crimsoned with fresh anger.

"I have no more to say to him," said Carry; "but if he attack my brother's name—insulting me through him—I shall speak!"

"To me, if you will—not to this weak, old man."

"You take his part against your wife—why should I expect justice from you?"

Neal did not answer. He led his father up stairs, adopting his usual specific, and the old gentleman sat on the edge of the bed and began to whimper.

"What an unhappy marriage this has been, Neal!" he said.

"No—don't say that!"

"She's——"

"Say nothing more," interrupted Neal, "but get into bed. I will come up stairs in ten minutes' time, and see that you are all right."

"I have gone six months back in my brain to-night, boy, and all through her."

"You must understand that I never hear a word of complaint against Carry," said Neal, firmly. "You'll try to love her for my sake—will you not?"

"I don't—dislike her," he whimpered again; "she's very good and kind at times; but she has no consideration for my—my nerves!"

"There, get to bed. We'll say no more about it."

Neal went back into the drawing-room; to find Carry cowering in the chair, which he had vacated, with her hands spread before her face.

"Carry!" he said; but she did not answer him.

He waited a little while, then repeated her name, and still received no answer.

He went on, as though she had replied to him, but with a deeper, darker look upon his face.

"Once before I have asked you to be gentle with my father, for his son's sake—to ask me to be the mediator, reprover, anything you wish. You will have no mercy on him—or on me. Before we married, I told you that I had set myself the task of protecting that old man—taking care of him in his weakness, as he took care of mine—and I *must* have no interference."

The hands before the face trembled for an instant, but Carry uttered no reply. She was in the right this time—she was sure that she was,—and his reprimand was undeserved.

"You are listening?"

Carry would not answer.

"This is my wish—my will," asserted Neal; "I say no more concerning it. You are acting like a child now; and this burlesque of womanly dignity offends me."

Carry felt glad of that, and resolved to continue silent in consequence.

No one thought anything of offending her—why should he lay such stress on receiving offence? Was he so greatly her superior in everything, that she at every turn must succumb to him?

He asked if she were sorry for all that had happened that evening—he only wished to hear that she was sorry? But Carry would not answer; and Neal gave up the attempt, and went out of the room—to return suddenly, and lay his hand upon her shoulder.

“Carry, when you tell me with your own lips that you are sorry,” he said, sternly, “I shall be glad to hear it. Till then, I am insulted!”

Neal spoke like a lord and master then, and retired with some degree of dignity. But he was as foolish and weak as his wife, for he should have guessed that the way to her heart was through his love, and not through his commands.

He had had the opportunity to learn that secret, but he was not a keen observer, we have already said; and latterly he had been busy, and had been balked in schemes for greatness. He did not know it; but he let his own shadow stand in the way of the light which should have radiated round him.



CHAPTER II.

A VIOLENT REMEDY.

It is an analysis not the most pleasing to trace the progress of a disunion between two hearts, but it is an analysis that teaches a great moral, and it proves—unless this hand is too weak for the task it has set itself—how small are the beginnings which harden by opposition to granite.

That is a grand secret, the art of giving way at the right moment; known more often to women than to men, and saving much unhappiness in consequence. It was not known to Carry, for hers was a singular nature, that had been warped by incessant opposition, and had met with little kindness in its course. It was a nature high-spirited and proud, prone to resistance, but full of love for those who would take her to their hearts. A gentle firmness might have led her right; but a firmness that stood ever a cloak before the love that prompted it, was likely to do irreparable harm, and this was Neal's firmness after their last quarrel.

Neal had asserted his supremacy, and was waiting—sternly waiting, it appeared—for her contrition. He was not inclined to press for her humility; he left it to her better judgment, and he waited. But day after day passed without Carry asking for his forgiveness, or acknowledging the fault that she had committed, and a coldness, such as will occur under similar circumstances—arose between them, and was hard to set aside. They met at breakfast, at their

late dinner sometimes—though it seemed to Carry that he was from home more often than ever—they went to their room taciturn and grave.

Carry grew tired of silence after awhile, and husband and wife conferred together on domestic matters, dinner questions, and repairs, but evaded all signs of that tenderness which should not have wholly died away before twelve months were passed. Carry remembered Neal's assertion on that night they quarrelled last—until she owned her fault, he was insulted; but she could not think that Neal was waiting for any formal assertion of her error; she began to think, as weeks went on, and he maintained the same demeanour—what a terrible soul-destroying idea it is—that he had grown very weary of his marriage, and very tired of her. And Neal, all this while, was yearning for a word or look, and brooding in his turn on her indifference—on that spirit of opposition which preferred a life of separation to a word of regret for the past which had caused it.

They were apart now, this boy and girl, who had taken each other for better, for worse. Every day seemed to separate them more. Carry, when unhappy, was full of morbid fancies, and she could fancy now how evident the signs were of Neal's want of love for her—how readily he had tired of her, making no allowance for that excitability which he knew was her great weakness—for she had told him so herself—and setting always above her wishes his superior knowledge of what was best for both of them. She could see that he was ashamed of his marriage; when they quarrelled, he had said that he was ashamed of her, and he had meant it literally. It was very hard, for Neal had not married her blindly; he had seen the misery of her home; the awful poverty of her brother's house, whence she had sallied forth to meet him at the altar, a woman trusting to him to make her life bright. Then he had turned away; she had seen it gradually creeping upon him, that distaste for his home and her society; ever recurring was the shallow excuse of an invention that made no progress. She could believe that Neal regretted very bitterly his marriage; he had seen a woman better disciplined and more clever than she, and could regret that boyish folly which had tied him to her. It was the case of all hasty marriages; she had read it a hundred times in books, and she had known it more than once in real life, Shepherd Street way. Her father and mother had warned her of her folly, and she resisted them; Mrs. Higgs had even shaken her head at Neal's infatuation; but she had trusted in herself and Neal, and this was her reward.

Carry grew very jealous again concerning Neal's frequent absences from home, but maintained her grave demeanour, and showed but little sign of her uneasiness. They were not friends at heart, Neal and she, and she was too proud to complain. To his seeming want of interest in her, she returned but apathy. But she was very jealous, notwithstanding, and Neal was absent more than usual.

Despite his gloomy soliloquies concerning the cold-blast experiments he could not give up his project, which seemed now approaching to an end. Surely there was success but a little distance from him, and he sought Pike's house, and fought for the result with him. It was an excitement, this scheme; it rendered him less prone to dwell upon Carry's stubbornness, that refused to offer peace or ask for it; he was glad, perhaps, to be away from his dull home, under the circumstances; she might be more pleased to see him if he were not so constantly before her; thrown more into companionship with his father, old Mr. Galbraith and Carry might become better friends.

Carry went one night to Crow Street again, impelled onwards by that jealousy which we have seen before in her. She did not call for her husband at Mr. Pike's, but she watched the house for awhile, stole into the scrap of ground between the house and pavement, and looked over the window-blind. Yes, there were Mr. Pike, his niece, and Neal sitting together, none of them very busy, a few papers sprinkled about, Neal in high spirits, talking and laughing to Ada Merton as he never did to his wife now. That was Neal's home, not the house in Fife Street. He was happy there, whilst he left her to wait upon the fancies of his mad father. Any excuse to take him there, and keep him away from her—she could see it all very plainly, and she went back more full of bitterness than ever. Nobody had ever cared for her long—there must be a something in her disposition that repelled people. She wondered if Walter Tressider had discovered that also? He had not come to Fife Street lately!

That very night Neal returned home in better spirits. He was looking brighter, and he came into the room humming a tune. He had started with a new resolve to alter home affairs, but Carry never knew that. The experiments that night had proved much—almost all—that they were striving for: and whether a fortune were made by the discovery, or some trade co-operation swindled the inventors of their gains, it was satisfactory to think that a few more weeks, perhaps, might show that they had not worked in vain.

Neal came in, and was checked by Carry's sullen face. To his first words she answered without looking up, and when he sat down by her side, she drew her chair away, and made more room for him. Neal turned the key on all his better feelings, and thought of that last quarrel that had never been made up between them. Carry continued her work, and Neal went over to his father's corner, and spoke in a lower tone of the progress he and Pike were making.

That same night—unlucky coincidence—Walter Tressider arrived. It was striking ten when he came into the room.

"Not too late to be welcome, I hope?" he asked.

"No, not quite so late as that," answered Neal.

Neal was glad to see Tressider now; the presence of a friend distracted him, and rendered home more bearable. Carry did not

parade to the world her grievances, and it was pleasant to see Carry at her best.

"I have been under the doctor's hands," said Walter; "laid up with a hoarseness, which sticks to me yet. In defiance of all orders, I have stolen out to-night. I could not stay any longer in those confounded lodgings in Mount Gardens, staring at the medicine-bottles on the mantelpiece. Will you take pity on me for an hour?"

"Willingly."

"And you, Sir, will bear with me?" said Tressider.

"You are not much in the way," muttered Mr. Galbraith.

Walter Tressider began a long account of his illness, of the loss it had been to him in a pecuniary sense of the word—of the horrors of indisposition in a dull lodging-house, with no friends near him. He was very lachrymose for a time, but brightened by degrees, seeming to thaw in the friendly warmth of Neal Galbraith's fireside.

Suddenly, at that fireside, there leaped into Carry's heart an old, old, wicked thought, that is for ever working no end of new evils. What if she showed to her husband that there were some people not indifferent to her yet, one, at least, over whom, with a little skill, she could exercise her power? By making Neal a little—only a little—jealous, there might ensue for her a greater amount of attention from her husband, a return of that husband's love to her from its misdirected channel. Fair manoeuvring to rouse a cold-hearted lover, sometimes; but in a wife, a dangerous game to play, and capable of hideous interpretations. Carry's was not a deep mind and took its bias from the surface of things. She had read of this scheme in books—it was the plot of novels, the element pervading comedies and farces, in which she had played herself—everyone laughed at the mistakes, and admired the ingenuity of the "situations," why should not Neal, when all was known? She did not give much thought to Walter Tressider's feelings, or think how far her by-play might affect him; and in her heart, perhaps, there was a faint desire for retaliation. She was curious, too—anxious, to see if Neal could be jealous, if it were possible to arouse him from that coldness and stolidity which had rendered her miserable so long.

Carry was not demonstrative, but acted naturally. It was her gift—that representative faculty, that had made her society sought for by young people who were fond of play acting. The novelty of the idea pleased her, and perhaps she was scarcely in her right senses that night, for she had been watching Neal in Crow Street.

Carry became suddenly solicitous concerning Tressider's rashness in coming out that night; ventured to scold him for it; made him promise that he would not call at Fife Street again, until he was perfectly recovered; hinted at the anxiety of herself and husband at his long absence from their residence; was afraid that Neal or she

had given him offence in some way or other, and he had resented it by keeping away from them.

It is doubtful which evinced the greatest surprise at all this pretty fooling—Walter Tressider or Neal. There was nothing in it, nothing to be alarmed at, or to feel flattered concerning—but it was different from Carry's usual manner, and both stared a little in consequence, Tressider becoming awkward and confused after awhile. Carry did not over-act her part, and so readily deceived both men. They did not perceive the motive at the bottom of all this, only the showy surface, which was intended to mislead. Neal saw that Carry was pleased beyond her wont at Tressider's return, and was glad upon first thoughts to see her brighten up so readily; and Tressider, who had lingered round the flame, dull and miserable, and yet unable to wholly tear himself away, felt his brain reeling and his heart fluttering. He had been nearly a month absent; he had imagined that they were getting tired of him there, and he had felt assured that it was the better policy to keep away, until the delight of Carry at his reappearance helped to revive in him almost the old romance.

A good-tempered and a good hearted fellow, this Walter Tressider; one who meant no harm, and would not in cold blood have sought to harm any living thing; who loved to see Carry, and took even a morbid pleasure in thinking that he had lost her for ever; but who would no more have schemed to win her love from Neal, than he would have essayed to take Neal's life. Honourable in his own estimation of what was his duty to his neighbour, but unstable as water, having not the strength to resist temptation, if assailed persistently, and in that phase known best to *him* who studies the idiosyncrasies of the erring.

That first night he gave way, though he would not have owned it to himself. Had Neal taxed him with a thought injurious to his peace, Tressider would have shrunk with horror from the charge, and denied it with all his heart and soul; but Carry's looks reminded him of the time when they were all in all to each other, and no Galbraith had robbed him of the prize. He believed that he had talked himself out of his folly—he believed it still, though he was restless and feverish that night. He went home thinking of his first love, and of what a fool he had been to seek her out and give her up, assuring her that he was a scamp who could never make a good husband. She took him at his word, though she had loved him very dearly, and this was the end. Surely the end of all folly and delusion had come when he knew that she was married.

After he had gone, Carry, flushed with success, sat down to tremble at the result, to wonder if Neal *had* been jealous, to feign deep fits of thought which would puzzle him by their intensity. Neal was silent after Tressider had gone, but then that was a habit of his now, and she could read no story from his inflexibility.

She must wait. In the future, when his love had re-awakened by

these means, she would tell him that it all had been done to keep his heart from straying away, and he would value her all the more for her power, and seek to hold her closer to his breast from that day. It would be a pleasant story to think of, and a still more pleasant triumph for her. Thinking it over in her room that night, with Neal quietly sleeping by her side, she knew then how she had learned to love Neal, and yet what a blank his firmness, or his unconcern, had made of her life. She knew more than this, but she kept the secret from her husband, who held her at arm's length. In a few months' time—six months at furthest, there would be another link to bind their hearts together, and make love between them far more easy. Had that cruel barrier not have built itself between them, she would have told him of her hope a month ago; now she would wait till they were better friends, and surprise him in the first flush of happiness following their reconciliation. She would spare Neal, too, at the first sign of his uneasiness—his fear that inattention or want of kindness had alienated her affection.

But she knew no more of Neal's true character than Neal of hers—or that Neal would have preferred to die, had that indomitable will of his, growing with his growth, and making him very strange and stern, decided that it was better to betray no sign.

Neal was terribly quiescent—she only knew that. If there were a difference, it was in an extra degree of coldness to herself, and that she could not bear, and must resent. There were evidences of change in his habits, and that might be the dawn for which she prayed.

As Tressider came more frequently again, so Neal stayed at home more constantly, and played the host at Fife Street. If her husband were watchful, nervous, so much the better for the plot, thought this wild wife, who took stage plots as fitting for real life; but she did not think of the watchfulness of others—of Mr. Galbraith, from his corner, taking stock of the *minutiae* of her frivolity. And, above all, she did not dream of Walter Tressider estimating her jest as earnest; she had faith in bringing Neal to her feet, without luring on to his fate the foolish man with whom she was trifling.

It was a more quiet piece of acting, after the first night; Carry had but to fan the flame, for Walter Tressider was weak enough to betray his interest in all that she did and said. Having no evil in his heart, or thinking that he had not—which was it?—he made no secret of his pleasure in her society or of his interest in her. A more designing man would have deceived witnesses and watchers, but Tressider betrayed his liking by his very ignorance of how intense that liking was. It was a grand game of cross purposes, in which each was absorbed in his or her hand, and forgot the play

of others in the match. The only one judging for others as well as himself was Galbraith the Inventor.

Neal was sitting before the fire one night after Tressider had gone home, in much the same attitude, brooding and stern, as when his father had sown the seeds of the last quarrel between Carry and him—when that father again took his place by his side. Carry had gone to bed; she always went away first now, and Neal following in due course, found her asleep, or feigning, perhaps, and so life's monotony flowed on.

"Neal," said the old gentleman, in a husky whisper—he had become alive to the danger of speaking in a high key by this time—"aren't you getting very tired of that skipjack coming backwards and forwards here?"

"He's good company," replied Neal, evasively; "he keeps the house alive."

"I never liked the man from the first," said Mr. Galbraith; "he wants solidity. I wouldn't trust such a man with anything above the value of a sixpence!"

"You are prejudiced against the name."

"Very likely—it is not a lucky one."

"No—it is not."

Neal seemed anxious to dismiss the subject, fearful of what his father might say next. He rose and stamped his feet upon the hearth-rug.

"How cold it is to-night! I think that I shall go up stairs now."

"Wait one moment—I want to talk to you about this man. I want you to tell him plainly, and straightforwardly, not to come again."

"Have you taken so great a dislike to him, then?"

"I detest him!"

"Why, that's not Christianlike!" said Neal, trying to put the matter in a light less sombre; "you must not be so hard upon mankind, father."

"I—I don't think that he comes to see you, or cares so much for your company, as you——"

"Hush!" said Neal, quickly and imperatively; "that's an uglier thought than all the rest—keep it to yourself."

There was something touching in the manly dignity with which Neal set *that* aside; he would have no suspicion of evil intentions in his friend, for they affected his wife's purity of thought, and degraded himself.

The father succumbed at once; he knew Neal's commands were not to be lightly disregarded, and he felt as though he had done wrong in striving to set things right. More and more the idea began to impress him that he was a meddler and a busybody, striving for his son's happiness, and, in the effort, placing it at a greater

distance from him. It was very hard, but very true, he feared. With his perceptive faculties becoming stronger, he began to see that he was not adding to anyone's happiness by his presence in that house. And yet what was to become of him, and where was he to go?

Neal went up stairs, and found Carry with her eyes closed. He stood looking at her, long and thoughtfully, as the Venetian Moor might have looked in the first days of his doubts, when he was fighting against them, and believing that he did *not* believe! Neal had been vexed and tormented; he had not required the expression of his father's fears to disturb him. Carry's new manner, her best spirits for the guest, and the worst for him; Tressider's growing embarrassment and forgetfulness, were all part and parcel of the perplexity which troubled him. Athwart his mind more than once passed the suspicion of the truth, but it brought no consolation. It could not gratify him to see Carry feigning all this interest in Tressider; it looked like a paltry revenge on his firmness, which would not give way until she expressed her sorrow for that past fault. He could not believe in so mean a retaliation, and he saw in Tressider no acting. He needed no prompting from his father, as to the best method of procedure; he was watching intently now, and Walter Tressider's days of visiting were numbered. Still he wished to spare everybody a scene—Neal disliked scenes—and he was not going to show Tressider that he was jealous of him. He judged Tressider more accurately than most people with whom he had come in contact—but then Tressider's character was shallow, and no extra degree of penetration was necessary. Meanwhile, let him make sure of Carry's thoughts, and be gladdened by the knowledge of her faith in him. The better time was coming, he trusted, and looking at her that night, sleeping so peacefully, he could believe it.

Galbraith the Inventor was more perplexed than Neal, for he was of a more suspicious nature. Moreover, he had a horror of the name of Tressider, and he had prophesied concerning that new comer, who took his place so complacently in Neal's drawing-room. He sought counsel of Mrs. Higgs, having failed with his son, and next morning, when Carry was absent, he unburdened his sorrows to that faithful servant, and took away her breath by his suspicions.

"It is not that I believe in any harm," said Galbraith; "but I can see that it will lead to much unhappiness. Carry's very young, and vain, and fond of admiration, and Neal is as hard as iron, and desperately obstinate."

"Mrs. Higgs had not recovered her breath yet. She was thinking of the past, bringing to recollection many things connected with it, and seeing by degrees how easily trouble might arise to those "two young things," as she called them.

"What does Tressider want here, night after night?" said Gal-

braith; "coming in after his stage-ranting, and keeping us up all manner of hours, listening to his twaddle!"

Mr. Galbraith could be very severe, it may be seen. The sharpness of his tongue had made him many enemies, before the weakness of his head led them to pity and forgive him.

Mrs. Higgs did not say a great deal that morning, but she listened patiently to Mr. Galbraith's communications, and, favoured by the luxury of an attentive listener, Mr. Galbraith grew verbose enough. Carry, on her return, found her aunt and father-in-law in the front parlour, and from their confusion she guessed that they had been speaking of her. Never mind, the dawn was coming now, and all would be explained shortly. Let them think what they liked of her, just now, it did not matter much. She was the heroine of a comedy, that was verging on its fifth act.

Mrs. Higgs went out that afternoon, to brave the frowns of Mr. Webber, in Shepherd Street. But Mr. Webber was not at home, and therefore his frowns were spared her. What she learned of her sister Johannah that might throw a light on Carry's antecedents, and confirm parts of an old story which had been nearly forgotten, we shall see in due course. But she returned pale and agitated to Fife Street, and the next morning, and once more in Carry's absence, held a slight consultation of war—war to the knife against Walter Tressider!—with her old master.

That evening Neal went to Mr. Pike's, and remained there till a late hour. In the interim, Mr. Walter Tressider appeared, expressed his regret at Neal's absence, remained much longer than necessary, dwelling upon an offer that had been made him by a country manager, and only rose to go when Carry, startled by his reluctance to withdraw, rose first, and spoke of the probability of Neal being very late that night. Carry had begun to see the dangerous nature of her method, and to shrink from further experiments. She was only waiting now for evidence of Neal's anxiety for her—some signs that he was really jealous!

Walter Tressider departed; Carry and Mr. Galbraith sat at opposite ends of the room for the remainder of the evening, and then Carry went to bed. Very late, and with the snow upon him, Neal let himself into the house with the latch-key, and came into the drawing-room.

"What! still up, father?" he exclaimed.

"I wasn't very sleepy to-night. Any good result with the furnace?"

"Pretty fair—we shall have it in good time, I think. You must come with me to-morrow."

"Thank you."

"Carry has gone up stairs, I suppose?"

"Long ago."

"Any letters—anyone been?"

"No letters—Mr. Tressider has called."

"Oh! has he?" said Neal, carelessly; "sorry that I was not at home to meet him. How—long did he stop?"

"An hour—or an hour and a half."

"The devil he did!"

Neal was sorry that he had betrayed his vexation, and hastened to rectify the error. He spoke of the experiments that Mr. Pike and he had worked at all that night—of the new furnace-roof which Mr. Pike had had made since their last meeting. For once Galbraith the Inventor betrayed no interest in a scheme so engrossing, although he had been the founder of the idea, in an interval of lucidity. He said, when Neal had finished,

"I did not know till to-day, Neal, that Mr. Tressider and Carry had ever been engaged to each other."

"There was a liking between them once—never an engagement."

"Yes, there was an engagement between them—on the sly."

"Who says so?"

"Mrs. Higgs."

"Mrs. Higgs has blundered, as usual. Good-night."

"God bless you, boy!—Good-night."

Neal went up to his room somewhat hastily; but on the first landing paused, and thought for a while. Of the cold-blast scheme—or of a colder, keener blast that seemed to have found its way into his heart and home? A movement of his father's below took him up stairs the rest of the way to his bridal chamber.

He looked at the fair face of his wife in the old, thoughtful way, wondering very much. Could she sleep there so peacefully, and have one thought against him?—and yet could she look like that, and yet make no effort to come back for all the love and confidence he yearned to give her? Why, he was nearer success in life now than in love—he might be able to raise her to independence in a few more weeks, and yet she cared not to hear the news.

She opened her eyes, and looked at him. They were large and bright enough, and showed no sign of having been disturbed from slumber.

"I thought that you were asleep," said Neal.

"No—I have not been asleep. I have been thinking."

"About what?"

"Nothing."

Neal asked no further questions; he locked the room door, and dropped into a chair. Carry lay and watched him, feigning not to watch, and noticed how his face shadowed, and what an intensity of thought beset it.

Was he thinking of Addie Merton, of his father's plans, at which he professed to work still, or of her and Tressider? He had

watched her sorrowfully a little while ago, believing that she slept—he had been thinking of her! It would all be bright enough now perhaps, if she only had the patience to wait, and not mar her own work.

CHAPTER III.

THE BEST INTENTIONS.

IF Neal had given voice to his doubts at this juncture, Carry might have had reason to congratulate herself on the result of her scheming. But Neal remained silent, retaining ever that stolidity of aspect, which nothing seemed to shake. Carry was nearly at the end of her tether; there was no more to feign; she had played her part through, and the failure of all efforts was inevitable.

She had made one sad discovery, during these attempts to rouse her husband's love—she had found that there was no love to rouse; that Neal had readily forgotten her, and it was the old, old story of a boy's love—a boy's whim—that sought eagerly its object, and let all passion die out with him when the chase was over. She should not have trusted to him, or made so desperate a leap—in seeking to escape an unhappy home, she had but fled to another whose desolateness was more intense. Neal was one and twenty now; he had reached man's estate, and with his manly thoughts had died out the boy's affection. If she had married Walter Tressider, it would have been so different a life—if she had only waited and had faith in him! If—and then Carry would pause, and dash the tears from her eyes, and set about the household duties of her little home. She had no right to think of Walter Tressider—he was far back in her retrospects; and, after all, he was not like her hard, clever husband. Neal never gave way like Walter Tressider—oh! if he would, but for once, before the breach widened between them, and they settled down in life wholly indifferent to each other, as her father and mother had settled down years ago.

Still there was one faint chance yet—when their child was born, it might make a great change, and turn Neal's thoughts towards her. She prayed it might, and the hope for which she prayed was more honest than the melo-dramatic scheming in which she had hitherto indulged.

Early in the afternoon following the day mentioned in our last chapter, Carry was surprised by a visitor. Addie Merton had ventured for the first time in life to invade the precincts of Fife Street.

It was an embarrassed meeting for a few moments on Carry's side; she had not anticipated that guest; she had been thinking unfairly of her lately, envying her Neal's visits, and Neal's society; she was not quite sure that she had not betrayed her jealousy to Miss Merton on that memorable night when she humiliated Neal by calling for him.

Mr. Galbraith, senior, was departing for his usual walk when Miss Merton arrived, but he stayed a few moments conversing with her, asking after Mr. Pike's health, and treating her with a grace and urbanity that Carry thought had never been shown to any one related to *her*. Carry's mind was always making comparisons and finding the result against her.

When Mr. Galbraith had gone, Miss Merton sat down by Carry's side and looked very steadily into her face. Carry could but notice then what a pale, earnest face it was.

"Mrs. Galbraith," she said suddenly, "I have offended you in some way—will you tell me how?"

Carry was not accustomed to these leading questions—they took her off her guard, confused, and vexed her. They might be evidences of an outspoken nature, but they sounded to Carry rude and defiant.

"You have not offended me, Miss Merton," answered Carry; "pray assure yourself that that is a mistake."

"I think that we should have been better friends by this time," continued Addie; "my dear uncle is attached to your husband—your husband comes very often to our house."

"Very often," ejaculated Carry.

"They are like brothers," Addie went on without heeding the interruption, "and are, as you know, likely to be partners."

"Miss Merton, I know nothing," said Carry, hardening rather than softening at this appeal; "my husband does not condescend to impart any information relative to his business pursuits; he reserves it for his friends."

Carry Galbraith never could disguise her feelings in excited moments; she betrayed at once, in that interview, all that her own pride, her esteem for Neal should have kept back. Fortunately, to betray her troubles to Addie Merton was to set a friend at her side, and awaken a new interest.

"Carry—forgive me calling you by that name, but Mr. Galbraith always speaks of you as Carry to us—" said Addie, "you are not happy. You are jealous of Neal's visits to our house—I see that."

"You see that I am jealous?" cried Carry, swelling with indignation; "how mistaken you are!"

"Well, I hope that I am," said Addie, in reply, "for I want you to come more often—to come with Mr. Galbraith, and be interested with him—with all of us—in the progress making in the cold-blast

scheme. Oh! Carry, they are so near success, and success will make so great a difference to all of us!"

"Will it?" responded Carry, listlessly.

"And if I have offended you, pray tell me how, and let me do my best to make amends," urged Addie. "Sometimes I speak out more hastily than I should, but it is in the impulse of the moment, and no one regrets it afterwards more bitterly than I. Was there anything said to wound you on that night we first met each other?"

"You are mistaken—I am not offended with you," persisted Carry; "but I am not interested in experiments, and it is a long way to Crow Street."

"If I were married," said Addie, reflectively, "I think anything that interested my husband would be a source of interest to me."

"Have you paid me this early visit in order to lecture me on the proprieties, Miss Merton?" Carry asked, satirically.

"No—don't think that," said Miss Merton, quickly. "Receive me, as I have come here, in good faith."

Carry was touched for an instant by this young woman's earnestness, but she could not understand her. Between their natures were opposing elements, which were distorting mediums to look through.

"Well!" said Carry, thoughtfully.

"I will confess to you more plainly why I have intruded here—I have told you partly my reasons, and you have assured me that I am wrong. I don't think that you would tell me an untruth."

Carry winced, coloured, felt her heart rebel again. No, she should never like this young woman—with her obtrusive goodness. She was too plain-spoken for her—she was not "her sort."

"My dear uncle, then," Addie Merton proceeded to explain, "is solicitous concerning Neal."

"Neal!—oh!"

"We call him Neal at Crow Street now," Addie hastened to say; "he has been always Neal to my uncle, who loves him very much, and I have fallen into the way too, just as if I was his sister. You do not mind that?"

"Oh! no," said Carry, with a little toss of her head; "go on."

"My uncle, then—both of us, for that matter—have seen how greatly Neal has altered, what a grave man he has become, and how, in every way he has not improved for the better. My uncle has taxed him with the change, and he replies that we are both mistaken, both full of fancies, and that he is the same man, with nothing on his mind except the wear and tear of thought occasioned by his studies. But somehow it is an unhappy-looking face!"

"He is not happy, perhaps," answered Carry, coldly. "I do not think it likely that he ever will be——"

"Till I die," she was going to add, but checked herself. This young inquisitor must not know too much.

"Why not?—what is to render him unhappy?" asked Addie.

"I don't know. You must ask him rather than me."

"No—you ought to know," urged Addie; "you are his wife, from whom he has no secrets, whom he loves, and in whom he confides. And I come to you from my dear, thoughtful uncle—oh! you do not know how good he is!—not to pry into your secrets, but to assure you that in any way you may rely upon our help. That if it be a money trouble—and marriage makes a difference in housekeeping—my uncle says he need not grieve for that; and if it be a trouble of the mind or heart, we might be able to act as mediators. Do not think we are officious in thus intermeddling, but we claim a right as friends."

"I have said that he has not spoken of his trouble to me. Neal has always been a grave man—I think that, perhaps, you have been a little over-zealous in this case."

"You see nothing to fear?"

"Nothing."

"Then perhaps we are wrong in this too?" said Addie. "You should know best. Only—only Mr. Pike has been very anxious, and has made me the same. I have fancied that lately there has been a difference in Neal."

Carry set her white teeth together again—this repetition of her husband's Christian name was not pleasant to hear.

"Time will make a change in him, perhaps," said Carry, coldly.

"I hope so. When success has rewarded the efforts of him and my uncle, I have hope of brighter times. Perhaps it is this search for an idea that has altered him—for my uncle has grown very thoughtful too, but then it is a different kind of thought to your husband's."

Addie hesitated at last to continue. Carry maintained an equable demeanour, and showed no warmth of interest in a topic that should have been "all in all" to her. Was it possible, thought Addie, that the secret lay in the want of sympathy between man and wife—and that they were discontented with each other? Had it been a rash marriage, of which each had repented?

Frank as she was, Addie could not intrude upon that subject. Her shrewd common sense warned her that it was dangerous ground to encroach upon, and that it was not her place, or in her power, to interfere. Between husband and wife she could not be peacemaker—a girl of seventeen, respecting the former and knowing but little of the latter. Had she and Carry been great friends, she might have essayed the task, ever impracticable; but with that cold, defiant face confronting her, she felt that her duties to her neighbour were ended in that house.

Addie had been a little vain on her powers of mediation until then.

Most people had admired her, and learned to love her; she was a favourite with her friends, her poorer neighbours, with all who understood her; but here was a young woman whom she felt she could have loved for the very qualities opposed to her own, holding herself aloof, and evidencing dislike. The young wife was not a happy woman—it was certain—and there probably lay the secret of Neal's sorrows. It was Addie's suspicion at least, but she could not utter a word concerning it.

She made one more effort towards friendship.

"You will not keep away from Crow Street, I hope," she urged; "if you don't like me now," she added with a naïveté that might have raised a smile at another time, "you will when we know each other better. It seems very odd for your husband and my uncle to respect each other and you and I to be strangers."

"It is odd," murmured Carry.

"He is so noble and earnest a man—with a mind so far beyond his years—your husband!" said Addie, quite enthusiastically.

"He should be flattered by your kind opinion of him."

"It is my uncle's as well as mine."

"It is satisfactory to think that you all agree so well together," said Carry, with cutting sarcasm.

Addie turned quickly at this reply, full of a new thought.

"Perhaps you don't like him to be so often from home? Can we come here when the furnace is not wanted? Can——"

"No, no," interrupted Carry; "that would not suit Mr. Galbraith, I think. But—I am detaining you, perhaps, from *other* missions of kindness. Your time must be valuable."

Addie rose with Carry. It had been a terrible failure, this interview, and Addie had had hope in it, after her conference with her uncle that morning. She had believed in Carry accepting their help—if it were needed—and in all working together to one common end. She had been met with coldness, and a something very like disdain; and there had crossed her mind, and settled thereon, a belief in the unhappiness of the wife as well as the husband.

They parted, and Addie went slowly and thoughtfully down Fife Street, to meet Walter Tressider lounging at the street corner, haggard and pale.

"Mr. Tressider!" she exclaimed.

"Miss Merton," he replied, stammering and colouring, "how strange that I should meet you here! Have you been to Mrs. Galbraith's?"

"Yes."

"Well, I hope? That is, I saw her last night, and no doubt she's well enough," he added a little incoherently.

"You live in the neighbourhood?" asked Addie.

He proceeded to walk by her side, in a listless, slouching style, that gave him a disreputable appearance, well dressed as he was.

"Yes, just here," he answered vaguely; "and for a little while. I think of going abroad—to Australia—with a little working company of players."

"Abroad!" repeated Addie, in a lower tone.

"I—I don't like England much—there's no one that I care for—that is, that cares for me; and I'm better out of England."

"Always unsettled, Mr. Tressider."

"I don't see my way to settling down," he said; "I'm a regular fool, you know, Miss Merton. I always have been."

"Your profession does not tend to settle you, I think," said Addie.

"Ah! you are a dissenter—you have all the dissenter's abhorrence for the player."

"I should have liked to hear—that is, my uncle would have been glad to hear—that you had been successful in some other calling."

"I tried one calling, and it did not answer. I was cut out for this. Haven't I said so more than once, when I used to call in at Crow Street and horrify poor Pike?"

"It don't seem right—it can't be right," said this prim little Methodist, "a life of acting—a life with the——"

"Don't run them down, Miss Merton," he added quickly; "there are some good men and women in their midst, and you cannot know much about them. I don't say," he added recklessly, "that I'm a good man. God knows that I should like to be, but I can't!"

"You are in temptation," said Addie, with a brightened colour; "night after night it faces you—and you so weak a man!"

"So weak a man!" he repeated sadly; "ah! that's true enough. If I had only your moral strength, Miss Merton—but then women have more of that material than we have; and fate's been even against me."

"Don't talk of fate," said Addie, quite warmly; "that's the coward's excuse for all the evil he creates."

"I am a coward," said Tressider, warmly; "I never owned myself a brave man. I creep on my knees towards the danger, and then sit staring at it, with no strength to move away. You would pity me very much if you knew all my life—why, I would give anything for that courage of my uncle which took him out of the world."

"Hush! hush!" cried Addie, "this is wicked. Whether true or assumed, wicked in the extreme, and not even excusable as the stage rant by which you profit. Mr. Tressider, you have not altered for the better."

"No," with a short laugh, "that's true enough!"

Addie increased her pace, as though she would outwalk him,

and shake him from her by those means. He accepted the hint, muttered an indistinct "Good-morning," and lounged back towards Fife Street, where he seemed to hover like a bird of ill-omen, and where he was seen by more eyes than Addie Merton's.

CHAPTER IV.

WALTER TRESSIDER FORGETS HIMSELF.

MEANWHILE Carry Galbraith, after the departure of her unlooked-for visitor, had sat down to the table to brood upon her wrongs. She had taken a false view of the motives which had brought Miss Merton to her house, and a first impression lasted some time with Carry.

She could see it all now; it was clear enough. That girl of seventeen, with her mock modesty and her cunning, had stolen there to learn her secrets. She had wished to face her rival and judge for herself if Neal's—that woman called him Neal!—account of her were true enough. Or Neal might have been dispirited lately and she had come to see the cause. At all events, and under any circumstances, she had not come as her friend; Neal might even have sent her, and—to this height had her jealous fancies worked themselves at last—it was very likely that people had begun to talk of Neal's visits to Crow Street, and to wonder why the wife was always left behind. She felt that she hated this Miss Merton—whose every word and gesture had been studied before she came into that house—and that her coming was an intrusion and an insult. She was inclined to judge everything wrongly in that bitter time. Neal had deserted her. He had no confidence; he told her nothing; he set his father before her in everything, and he confessed his hopes and fears to Addie Merton, not to his neglected wife.

She was brooding there—how long she had sat at that table clutching her pretty chin, she never knew—when Mrs. Higgs's voice aroused her. She had not heard her aunt enter the room, but there she was, standing before her, looking down at her with a seared motherly face.

"Oh! Carry, I wants a sight of talk with you. May I?"

She asked it somewhat nervously, and her manner still further aroused Carry. It was so different to her sharp, crisp way.

"Well, aunt," said Carry, leaning back in her chair, "talk on. What is the matter?"

"That's what I want to know myself, and you can tell me if you will."

"Can't you guess?" was the hard answer.

"I might guess wrong—I hope I should."

"I wouldn't guess—I wouldn't think anything about it," said Carry hastily; "no good can come by paining me with questions, or by seeking to satisfy a paltry curiosity."

"You're not happy, gal."

"Why, that's easily seen," replied Carry; "you might have found that out months ago."

"I did," was the quick answer.

"What makes me unhappy, I can't tell you very well. Marriage is not the blissful state I deemed it—there, take that for your answer, aunt, and let me think again."

"Thinking don't seem to do you good," said Mrs. Higgs, "and striving to get over all these thoughts would, or I'm no woman."

"You can't tell how I have striven—but with no one to help me, I give way."

"May I help?"

"You?" cried Carry, scornfully.

She had been led to say more than she had intended, and was vexed at her own candour. But this woman was her aunt, whom she knew loved her—was, perhaps, the only one in the world who cared one tittle for her—not the spy upon her secrets, as Addie Merton was. Yet this old woman touched the wrong key-note, as was natural enough, and woke up the usual discord.

"I think that I can help you, Carry," said Mrs. Higgs; "for I think that you are giving way, and being set with wicked thoughts. You married my young master without being sure that you could love him like a wife, and now married and settled down like, you won't try."

"You are as wrong as all the rest of them, I find," cried Carry; "you don't know how I have tried."

"You keep your husband worried by that play-acting fellow, who is always here."

"That worry him!" cried Carry; "what does Neal care?"

"I'm sure——"

"You have not heard Neal express one regret—have you?"

"He's too proud for that, more's the pity."

"Or too indifferent. Neal does not mind who comes to this house, or talks to me."

"I don't think *you* do," added Mrs. Higgs, dropping into her old sharp tone by degrees; "and I take the liberty to say how wrong it is. You're my niece, and I've a pride in you—and a stake in this marriage, which might be a happy one, if you were like anybody else. You're going into danger, Carry."

"No—I'm not."

"That man 'Essider, and you, were sweethearts once," she said; "and he comes here again, and you can't forget him. I don't think that he has any right to come, or you to 'courage him; it must unsettle you. For *you* know, Carry, that he's thinking of you still."

"No one ever thinks of me!"

"What is he always here for?—what does he hang about the end of the street, staring up like an idiot at this house for? I'd give him a good shaking, if I was a man—the mean-spirited, bad-hearted wretch!"

"He watches this house!—Walter Tressider?"

"Yes, it's gone as far as that, and yet it isn't wrong. Oh! Carry, this will lead to ruin, body and soul, and I too weak to stay you. I've knowed women like yourself led away by vanity until they didn't see the wrong from right, and didn't care. This must be stopped, as I'm a woman, and there's a Lord in heaven. I won't have this go on any more. I'll speak to Neal."

"Speak to him!" said Carry, defiantly, "and tell him to hold me down, and keep me away from Tressider. He'll only laugh—he don't care for my love going away from him. I am his wife, of whom he is very tired."

"You are wrong."

"You are an ignorant woman, guessing little of the thoughts at my heart or at his. Wait patiently, and take my word for it that there *is* no fear."

"There is!—oh! there is!" cried Mrs. Higgs, wringing her hands; "and you so stubborn, like you've allers been. I feared your temper when you married Neal—and now my fears are coming true."

"You'll drive me mad between the gang of you!" half shrieked Carry; "I will listen to no more of this. I will lock myself in away from you."

Carry sprang up and rushed away. She went to her own room, closing the door heavily behind her, and turning the key in the lock. She had striven hard to be misjudged, but the reality was very poignant. The crisis of her life was approaching, and she began to see through the mists that life's mistake. Carry could not rest in her room, however—she was more excited and unsettled there than she had been down stairs; and she struggled from the bed on which she had thrown herself, dashed her face into cold water, dried her eyes, and then returned to the drawing-room.

At the door of the room she paused; there were voices in the passage on the lower flight; the sharp voice of Mrs. Higgs—sharper and more resonant than ever—and the voice of him who had been the cause of much anxiety and misconception.

"You had better not come here when Mr. Galbraith's out," said Mrs. Higgs; "I think you had better wait till night, young man."

"I have been waiting now too long, and my business is of importance," Carry heard Walter Tressider reply; "be good enough to take up my message, and leave its answer to Mrs. Galbraith—if she says 'No,' I will withdraw."

"I shall not take up any message of yours—there."

Mrs. Higgs folded her arms, and looked defiantly at the visitor. It was evident that he was cowed by her demeanour.

"As you will," he replied; "I will come in the evening, then."

"Stay!"

Carry had flown down stairs, and was standing in the hall, flushed and excited. She had resolved on her course of action also, and it was time to end this comedy. She had been wrong herself, and must make reparation. She saw that now.

"You must not forbid my husband's friends this house without his consent or mine," she said angrily, to Mrs. Higgs.

"Mrs. Higgs may hear all that I have to say if she pleases," said Tressider.

"No," said Carry; "you are to be trusted. This way."

She went up stairs to the drawing-room, and Walter Tressider followed her, entering without closing the door—an instinctive delicacy for which Carry was grateful—and standing a few paces therefrom, hat in hand.

He stood there a sad picture enough—one could have guessed his character, and seen its reigning weakness by his vacillating face, his nervous shuffle with his feet.

"Say what you have to say in as few words as possible, Mr. Tressider. I have been troubled to-day, and I have something to tell you when you have finished."

"Perhaps it would have been as well for me to have gone away saying nothing," he murmured; "but I had not the courage; and," with a sudden impulsiveness that startled Carry, "I did wish to see you once more!"

"You are going away—where?"

"I am going to Australia. I made up my mind late last night, and closed with an offer which I had refused last week. I leave the day after to-morrow."

"Well?" said Carry, almost impatiently.

"I am a very miserable wretch—you are aware of it," said Walter; "step by step in life some misfortune has met me, hard to resist. I don't complain now—it's my luck."

"You have been fortunate in finding a place in the ranks of a profession already overcrowded."

"Ah! such luck as that I was not thinking of," he answered carelessly; "I must have been something, I suppose. I would prefer to remain in England, and work my way in England, but I feel that I ought not to stop here any longer. Oh! Mrs. Galbraith

—Carry " he cried, impetuously, "you should have been my wife long ago, and not have blasted every hope I had!"

"Don't say any more," said Carry with her hands spread out, as though by that action she hurled his words back; "but let me speak."

"You gave me up—you took me at my word when I was mad, and knew not what I said," he cried; "but I don't complain—I have not come here to reproach you, or act the stage hero in this house. Forgive me if I have given way—it is the last time, the very last that we shall ever meet."

"You should not have come to talk like this to me," said Carry, coldly, but with her hand upon her upheaved bosom.

"I did not wish to steal away like a thief—forgive me again, but I do not even think that it is a crime to love you, when I wish no harm to Neal, and only happiness to him and you. Upon my soul that is what I wish—nothing more. Will you believe me?"

"Yes."

"I thought that I could come, and make Neal my friend, profiting by his energy and industry; I looked for happiness ahead of me, and I fancied that I could see you, day after day, and feel content. The knowledge that you were Neal's wife, was to be a stronger power to keep me down, than the consciousness that I had loved you first of all, and we had promised once to be married to each other. But I was a fool!—every day you reminded me of my loss, of the Carry Webber who had trusted in me, and latterly I dared to think——"

"No matter what," interrupted Carry, eagerly; "your thoughts misled you, and you have no right to tell me what they were. Have you any further confession to make to a married woman, Sir?"

Walter Tressider hung down his head.

"Nothing more—I wish you to bid me good-bye—to tell Neal everything that I have said to you, and how I think it best for all of us that I should take myself away. That's all."

"You have been afraid that I should love you," said Carry scornfully—"I see that by your manner."

"No, I dared not think that!" he cried, colouring and stammering; "for my own sake I go away—for no one else's."

"Walter Tressider," said Carry, advancing to him, and holding out her hands, "I have to ask you to forgive me."

"Forgive you for what?" he said, moving back a step, and reluctant to imply by any action of his own that he had anything to pardon.

Carry let her hands fall to her side, and looked down at the worn carpet. Very beautiful and humble she appeared in that hour, and yet invested with a wifely dignity, that chilled this stage-struck fellow.

"You must forgive me," she said; "but I have been unhappy lately—I have missed my husband's love and confidence by some

strange chance and I was anxious by any means—at any cost—to bring it back. I did not love you—perhaps I have never loved you—but he knew that you had been my lover, and I was wicked enough to hope to win him back by jealousy. I never thought of you, or how easy it might be to revive that feeble passion which you had had for me; I did not reckon on the few days since your last disappointment—I thought of nothing but my husband. I was a woman with but one hope of happiness, and I could not let it escape me, even at the cost of sacrificing *you*. I have been very wrong, but you must not—you shall not!—go away with the idea that I was ever false in thought to Neal. I am glad that you have come—that I have found the courage to tell you this—to confess my meanness, and to ask you to forgive me.”

“You are forgiven, Mrs. Galbraith.”

Walter Tressider was mortified by this avowal, and yet he had not spoken as though he had had the faintest dream of her old love for him being existent still. But it was a strange confession; he saw that he had been made the dupe, and it seemed hard that she, of all the world, should have had the heart to trifle with him.

“I was a child—I had but a child’s strength of mind—and my wretchedness was driving me mad then, as it is now,” said Carry. “Oh! why did you ever come back here again?—it would have been more honourable to stay away.”

Carry dropped into a chair, and gave way to a passionate abandonment of tears. She was truly miserable, and the clouds seemed shutting her in. She made one hurried gesture that Tressider should go away, but he did not see it, and her heavy sobs unmanned him. He was weak enough to love her still, and the sight of her suffering was to take away the little self-command of which he had ever had to boast.

“Carry—dear Carry!” he cried, running towards her, “I know that I have been wrong to come here, but you led me on—you own it. I am all that is dishonourable; but you were unhappy, and I could not find the cause.”

“Away, Sir,” cried Carry, springing to her feet again—“I will not hear this. I hate you for a knave!—leave the house!”

“No, no—not hate me!”

It was a piteous appeal, but Carry did not retract her words.

“Not to go away for ever with that sentence!—not to part like this!”

“No—not to part like this!” said a stern voice behind them, and Neal Galbraith, with the devil in his face, came into the room, followed by his father.

“Gal—Galbraith!” ejaculated Tressider.

“I have been an unwilling listener for the last two minutes, Mr. Tressider,” said Neal, speaking very low, but with an intensity of bitterness; “but when one’s honour is at stake, we forget the re-

finements of society. Have you finished this very dramatic interview with Mrs. Galbraith?"

"Yes, Sir."

Tressider was recovering himself slowly, though the blushes had not burned out of his face yet.

"Then leave my house."

Neal pointed to the door, but Tressider hesitated.

"You will let me explain, Neal?"

"Sir, I have heard your explanation," replied Neal; "there is nothing you can add to it to soften my feelings, or alter my opinion of your conduct. You have brought your stagey manners into common life, and they have dazzled my wife for awhile, and insulted me."

"But——"

"Sir, will you go?"

Neal stood before him with his hands clenched, and his dark eyes kindling more and more. Tressider, watchful of results, went back a step, but held himself on guard.

"Neal, you misjudge me," he said. "If you had heard all——"

"Sir, I have heard quite enough. Are you going?"

"I have no resource but to go."

"You have heard my wife's verdict upon you, now hear mine. She hates you for a knave, *she says!*—I damn you for a scoundrel!"

Neal flung forward his right arm, but it was caught by his wife's hands, as Tressider recoiled.

"Well stopped, Madam," said Neal, ironically. "The act-drop should have fallen here, had we all been on the stage. We are a trifle too excited just at present to appreciate the workings of our drama!"

"Go, Sir," said Carry, to Tressider.

The actor went away at her request, still slowly and regretfully. Carry sank down in the chair she had quitted; Mr. Galbraith wrung his hands as he leaned against the mantelpiece; Neal, stern and dark, stood there a sentinel.

"My dear boy!" Mr. Galbraith began, when Neal checked him with a sudden gesture.

"Not just now—leave us, please."

"If you will only wait a bit!"

"Leave us," harshly reiterated Neal, and the father followed the suit led by Walter Tressider.

Husband and wife were left alone together.

CHAPTER V

THE FIFTH ACT

THE crisis had arrived at last—that crisis for which Carry had planned and deceived! It *was* the last act, but would it end like comedy or tragedy? All her past hopes were realised; Neal was jealous, and suspected her, but was this shadow that appalled her the event for which she had bargained in her rash frivolity?

Neal waited some time after his father had retired from the room before he spoke. For the world, Carry could not have broken that awful stillness first.

"Mrs. Galbraith," he said, at last, and his first words made her start as she sat there, "you have deceived me!"

Until that day he had never called her by his own name, and it smote upon her heart like a knell. It was with an effort that she answered:

"No—not deceived."

"I am not going to ask you for a defence," he said, more coldly; "it matters little to me what line of argument is used by a woman without one fair excuse for her duplicity."

"I have done no wrong—God knows that all I did was for the best!" said Carry.

"Chance brings me home to-day, when I am unexpected, to find that man here," said Neal; "chance, or a Providence that willed my shame," he added, bitterly, "brought me here a witness to his dastard conduct, and to your madness. You ask that fellow to forgive you—forgive you loving him still, I suppose——"

"No, no!"

"Will you let me speak?" asked Neal, so fiercely, that she shrank back with a stifled cry, "or will you take the part of the injured heroine, and let me listen? No, keep still," he said, detecting her impulse to respond, and checking it. "I have not had much to say to you lately, and I think the time has come to show that I am not a puppet in your hands. You have fancied me a boy-husband, to be treated like a boy. I have come of age, remember!"

Carry waited for an opportunity to speak—to confess all to him, owning her weakness even, and asking pardon for it.

"I told you just now that I had been deceived. It need not have surprised you, knowing how you had duped me all my life."

"It is false!"

"I was not aware till yesterday that you and Tressider had been

engaged to be married—my own father is my informant, not my wife!”

“Tressider told you—on that night he went away; he——”

“Told me nothing save lies, that were intended to mislead.”

“I thought that you knew all?”

“I do not believe it.”

“*Neal!*” cried Carry, looking intently into his face, and half rising from her chair.

“I repeat that I do not believe it,” said Neal—“and that there is no excuse for your deception, which I could take to heart, and say it brought me comfort. For ever after this—I doubt you!”

“Cruel!”

“Knowing that you never loved me—that you took me for a husband to escape a home a trifle more miserable than this—that you lay down by my side to think of Tressider, and mourn for him—that you loved him yesterday—that his presence here has been a solace to you—that with every day you have turned from me, and striven, by your pride and falsity, to break me down—I doubt you!”

“I do not deserve your doubts—I will not have them!”

“In everything you say and do, I shall watch for the hidden motive lurking in the background. My God!—this my wife, and I only one and twenty!”

It was a wild cry of rage and baffled love; but it chilled Carry to the heart. She detected the despair in its accents, but failed to perceive the grief therein. He wished her dead!—yes, he wished her dead now—he meant nothing else but that.

“Tell me what you believe of me!” she demanded. “Do you think that I am guilty—guilty of the Wrong?”

“If I had had that thought, you would have followed your fine lover, and I should not have wasted words upon you in reproach! For guilty women—there are the Streets, not the homes of honest men!”

“If you have not thought so badly of me—why not let me speak?”

“I do not wish to hear any defence—I have already said that there is no defence to which I could pin my faith. You have trifled with your danger—leading on that fool, tempting him and yourself, by raking over the ashes of a morbid passion. You are no woman fit for me!”

“I will go, then—I will not shadow your life by my obtrusiveness. I shall be as happy away from you as with you!”

“It is more than possible.”

“If I have been wrong, Neal, it was to lead you right, for you were turning against me. I thought that in your jealousy for Tressider would come back your old love!”

She had confessed this at last; but Neal's face did not brighten

at the revelation. It was full of shadow still, and Carry never hoped to see the light again there. But she waited—oh! how anxiously!—for his next words.

“And you wish me to believe this?”

“I ask you.”

“That is your excuse,” he said scornfully; “why, woman, it degrades you more! It shows the moral baseness to which your petty enmity would have reduced you, sacrificing your good name out of spite! It’s a lie!—you loved him!”

“On my soul—no!”

“It’s as false as you are!” cried Neal; “he hangs about the house day after day; he has written to you since your marriage, and you hide that letter from me; he was here this morning in my absence. And all this to rouse my jealousy!—the excuse is worthy of you!”

“Sir, you are unmerciful!” said Carry, full of resentment at Neal’s stubborn attitude; “I will not beg for forgiveness from you any more!”

“As you begged for Tressider’s!”

“You are not free from blame—you have neglected and humiliated me in every way—you love that girl in Crow Street, and it is the hope of winning her that makes you wish me dead!”

“I wished but your happiness and mine—and yours first,” said Neal; “but I regret this marriage now, with all my heart!”

“Enough!” pleaded Carry.

“Enough!” echoed Neal; and then he dropped into a chair by the fireside, and spake no more that day. How the day passed he never knew; no one brought up the tea, and no one asked for it; he had a dreamy consciousness of his father stealing into the room, looking wistfully towards him, and going out again; he remembered Carry sitting at the table, as silent as himself, and then the rustle of her dress on the stairs ascending. He sat there all the night—the long, cold night, before the empty grate, from which the brightness had died out, as surely as his heart’s had done; and it was only when the late morning came with its greyness to scare him, that he remembered where he was.

Then he woke as from a trance, and went down stairs, and out of the house—to business!

CHAPTER VI.

MR. GALBRAITH, SENIOR, MAKES ANOTHER DISCOVERY.

WE shall not attempt to follow closely the misery of the young wife's thoughts. Upon her plans revealed, the mine exploded, and the Lares and Penates piecemeal, it is not our intention to dwell. There are no words to convey fully the utter blankness which seemed before Carry, when she rose up that morning, and knew that Neal had not come near her all that night. It was isolation in its completeness, and she saw but little hope from that day.

She went down stairs early, but the room was empty. Neal had left with the first dawn, hugging his injuries closer to him, for that warmth denied him by the world. His was a nature retentive of wrong, and unforgiving; he had confessed as much once, and she had lightly made a jest of it. But jesting days were over now, and there was desert-land beyond. How would it end?—if she could only see how it would end!

Mrs. Higgs brought in the breakfast-tray, saying nothing, but looking a great deal. She had the instinctive sense of keeping quiet, of guessing all, and judging that silence was the wiser policy. She went out sighing heavily, and wishing that everybody had only been regulated by her advice some time ago. Carry sat with the breakfast untouched before her, until Mr. Galbraith crept into the room, with that scared expression of countenance which had not left him since last night. He did not ask where Neal was, but sat down at the breakfast-table, and felt his ponderous head all over, as though he was not quite certain that he had come down with the right one. Assured at last, he poured his own coffee out, then Carry's—both habits foreign to his—and pushed Carry's over to her side. But she did not notice the action, till he called attention to it by touching her arm.

"I don't care for breakfast," she said listlessly.

"I'd try a bit," he suggested, with more kindness in his tones than she had ever heard before. She was surprised, but it was a far-off kind of wonderment, that seemed to belong to a time anterior to this.

"No, thank you."

She wanted to sit still, and think of Neal's angry words. Of what a torrent they consisted, bearing all away with it—her defence, the story of her love and jealousy, everything that she had hoped to cling to, and found but straws swept away by the swirl of the stream. What a mad woman she had been! If she could but live

one month over again, she and Neal and Tressider, she would not fear to die at the end thereof. Then there rang in her ears those awful words of Neal's and they presaged the future.

"For ever after this, I doubt you. In everything you say and do, I shall watch for the hidden motive lurking in the background!"

And yet there might be hope deduced from those other words which rang out regretfully at last.

"I wished only your happiness and mine, and yours first." But then the awful wish that followed—submerging everything!

So Carry thought and pondered as to her wisest course in life, with the untasted breakfast at her elbow, and Mr. Galbraith watching her.

It was a long while afterwards that Mr. Galbraith startled her by saying,

"I don't see that any good can come from thinking like that, Carry; it would kill me!"

The newness, the kindness of his tones, were very startling again, but they were not of the present hour yet to Carry.

"It will all come right, now that you have had the matter out—and it was going wrong fast."

"Was it?" said Carry.

"He will come round—he was a lad who always came round after the fit was over. Passionate, awfully passionate before my *illness*, but sorry enough afterwards, if he were in the wrong. Not that he has been in the wrong this time—which is awkward rather."

"Don't speak of it."

"He came in five minutes after me, and only heard what would have puzzled the devil to make out. I was listening long before."

"What of it?" Carry asked quickly.

"He only heard you asking for forgiveness, and that fool of a Tressider raving, and you crying; and then Tressider accusing you of having led him on—what a capital memory I have got now!"

"And you heard——"

"I heard you wither the rascal up before that," he said, chuckling; "and all his flimsy rodomontade along with him. You don't know—how glad—I am—that you never liked that fellow!"

"Why do you not accuse me like your son?" said Carry; "*you* have been never just to me."

It was a child's fretfulness, and Mr. Galbraith saw it—dim-sighted as had been his perceptive faculties of late.

"I have been thinking of Neal, and the trouble in wait for him—a greater trouble than this one, which I know now could have never come to pass."

"A woman without a hope can drift on to any trouble."

"Ay! God help her! But there is hope for you, my daughter."

It was the first time that he had ever called her by that name.

"I don't know," she murmured; "I don't see any."

"How is that?"

"You are kind now, but if you had not set him against me quite so often!" said Carry; "you have stood ever between us, and he has fought your battles rather than mine. Of late, you have been the spy upon me, turning informer against a past of which I am not ashamed, but which, if you had left alone, would have been so much the better. You have helped on my misery, Sir, but I do not complain—I will never complain again, if I can help it."

"Good gracious!"

Mr. Galbraith held his head between his hands again—this was putting him in a new light, and it dazzled him. He thought the subject over for a long time, and then said, when Carry had forgotten it—

"Do you think—really—that you would have been happier without me here?"

"Yes."

"And Neal, too?"

"Yes."

"Good gracious!" he repeated, for the second time.

This was a discovery more startling than the cold blast, with something of the same nature about it. Happier both of them without him!—happier with him out of their way; making up their quarrels after their own fashion, and aggravated but by mediation. He thought over all the little differences that he had had with Carry; his memory was strengthening very rapidly; he could go back step by step for many months, and note the past incidents thereof, standing out like crags and headlands in the way.

Happier without him! Well, it was likely now that he came to reflect upon the matter, he thought with a little quivering sigh; he had never made anybody very happy, and he had been the cause of more than one dispute between this child couple. It had been Neal's duty to take care of him, and Neal had not shrunk from it; but had Neal been happy with him—as happy, he meant, as he would have been without him?

The old man's head sank more and more as he brooded upon this; he had no wish to distract Carry's thoughts now from the old channel; there were new ideas pouring in upon him. A painful, heart-depressing army of ideas to fall upon the old and world-worn; to remind them that they are in the way, and marring the enjoyment of those younger and more full of life—we pray we may be spared it in our dotage.

"Oh! dear!" the old gentleman sighed, after a time; but no response came, not even the echo of his own heart-wail.

Perhaps it would be as well if he were to go away, and leave

husband and wife to mind their own concerns. He had a little income of his own, and it would be sufficient for him, he being a man of few requirements. Besides, he need not go very far—he should not like to die alone, he thought—but rent some little room in the neighbourhood, where Neal could come and see him, if he wished. Perhaps it was best—perhaps it was the only way to make his son content. Whilst he was there Carry was dissatisfied, and Carry dissatisfied, rendered Neal so. He saw all that—he was convinced of that.

There was nothing of the weaker estate into which he had fallen in the sudden leap from his chair. Here was a new idea before him, and he must follow it to the end—he must begin at once, and not let anything stop him. He wasn't wanted there—he could believe already that he had been the cause of every trouble which had fallen on that house. And he was a Galbraith, and the Galbraiths had always been too proud to remain where they were not wanted. What had he been doing so long there, but sitting in people's way, and getting them to hate him as an incumbrance?

He went out of the room without Carry perceiving him, fetched his hat and went down stairs. At Mrs. Higgs's parlour-door he knocked.

"May I come in, please?"

Assuredly he might, and in walked the little man, with his hat on his large head, his cane in his hand, and his frock coat buttoned to the chin decisively. He looked altogether so decisive, that Mrs. Higgs scented fresh danger on the instant.

"Well, and what's the matter with you, too?" she asked not too courteously; "is there anything fresh to *gally* us?"

"Nothing of much consequence, Mrs. Higgs—but I want you to recommend a quiet lodging for me, in a respectable house, not too—too far away," he added with a gulp.

"What for?"

"I'm going to have a room of my own, Mrs. Higgs. It ought to have been done long ago—it ought indeed!"

"You!" said Mrs. Higgs, disparagingly.

"I—I shan't mind it much after the first few days—it's so easy to get used to anything, and I don't see much of Neal just now. Do you know if there be anything suitable at that corner place?—there has been a bill in the window this month."

"You'd better take a walk and think it over."

"Oh! my mind's made up, Mrs. Higgs," said the old gentleman very firmly; "it isn't as if I was a child, or likely to be persuaded into anything. I'll go—I'll find a place—and I'll send for my portfolio and my night-shirt in the course of an hour or two."

Mrs. Higgs reflected. She knew that it was useless to attempt to disturb the intentions of Mr. Galbraith, and that she must let him have his way. She was a sensible woman, who had seen some

time ago that Carry resented the constant presence of her father-in-law, and that their opposite natures had clashed too frequently. She was not quite certain that Mr. Galbraith's resolution was an unwise one.

"Well, I'll go with you, Sir."

"Eh?—where?"

"I'll help you find a place, if you don't mind 'meaning yourself to my 'oximity," said Mrs. Higgs, dashing into hard words as she became excited and beheading them remorselessly; "you and I together won't have long to look about us. But I don't see why Master Neal and Carry shouldn't move instead of you. You can't be *trapesing* about alone."

"They won't think of leaving me—they wouldn't like to hurt my feelings. I should wish it all done before Neal comes back this afternoon."

"Then we'll take a place for you and me, and I'll leave 'em the whole house, and, with Carry at her wits' end where to find the things, she'll brighten up, and so will *he*!"

"No, no," said the alarmed father, "you mustn't go on like that. They have trouble enough without your gambols. Find some kind, motherly person just to see to me a bit; when we're more settled, all of us, we can arrange this, and I should like you to take care of me very much then. For"—here his voice broke somewhat, till he mastered it—"I could not bear all the old faces gone away!"

Mrs. Higgs put her knuckles into her eyes, and then jumped up.

"Come on then, Sir—let us see about a room for a week. You won't mind a room for a week, until I straighten here a bit?"

"Mind, indeed!"

Mrs. Higgs put on her bonnet, without a glance at herself in the glass, and then master and servant went out together. They walked up Fife Street side by side, Mr. Galbraith very erect, and with his cane keeping military time on the pavement.

"That's the place I mean," said Mr. Galbraith, pointing to No. 1, Fife Street, in the window of which a torn card hung side ways, and informed the general public that there was an apartment for a single man within.

"He's a railway porter there, and will be coming in at all hours of the night—and his wife's a drab!"

"What's that?" asked Mr. Galbraith.

"A slovenly sort of woman, fal-lal like of a Sundav, but all the week—good Lord!"

"Indeed, now?"

Mr. Galbraith was perfectly satisfied with Mrs. Higgs's graphic description, but he passed the house reluctantly, nevertheless.

"I could have seen Neal go to business every morning from that window—couldn't I?"

"You'd have flopped out of it, leaning, and staring," said Mrs. Higgs. "We'll try the street across the road."

"I never liked that street."

But he crossed the road with Mrs. Higgs, looking back at No. 1, Fife Street, in his progress, and being nearly run over by a butcher's cart, the driver as reckless of human life as are all drivers of butchers' carts, by some strange dispensation.

"Lor' save us, do mind, Sir," said Mrs. Higgs, dragging him on the pavement by the collar. "At your time of life, you shouldn't look behind you."

They went up the opposite street, where Neal had made love to Carry, one dark night, a little while ago. Mr. Galbraith began to sigh very heavily.

"If you've altered your mind, Sir, let's go back," said Mrs. Higgs; "nobody will be a bit the wiser for us walking here."

"I have not altered my mind—I'm like a rock, Ma'am."

"That's well, then. Very likely it is for the best, Mr. Galbraith; and though they 'spects you very much, both on 'em, yet it isn't always quite the thing to be in the way. I dare say, now, your son Neal wouldn't have cared much for Webber always in that first-floor front—or even my sister Johannah, which is a milder 'racter."

"No, no—I dare say not. But I was such a selfish brute, and didn't think about it."

An apartment to let—a bill in the window announcing the fact—a two-storied house, with clean white curtains, and a door-step significant of industry and hearth-stone.

Mrs. Higgs knocked, was pleased with the landlady's appearance, casually introduced the single gentleman, and asked to see the room.

The single gentleman only wanted one large bed-room—for a week on trial—with space for a table in the corner. The table in the corner seemed to suggest some sinister designs on the part of the incoming lodger, for the proprietress said, with an eye bent on him angularly:

"He's not a portrait-taking man, and going to smell the house out, is he?"

"The table is for my plans, Madam."

"What do you want pans for?"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! the woman's deaf, Mrs. Higgs—and I can't bear deaf people!"

Mr. Galbraith ran away down the street, and Mrs. Higgs had to apologise, and run after him. She found Mr. Galbraith very excited, upon coming up with him. He was offended; he objected to Mrs. Higgs foisting deaf women upon him; if there were one set of people more objectionable than another, it was deaf people. Mrs. Higgs should have known better!

"I like people with all their faculties about them, Mrs. Higgs," said Mr. Galbraith, with becoming dignity.

He was some time recovering from the slight that had been put upon him, and was scarcely composed enough to give his opinion on the first apartment which he condescended to inspect. It was a large room, but he did not think that it would suit. He objected to the locality, and he wanted to know if a boy in the street with an iron hoop, yelling out a national apostrophe to "Susannah"—a favourite melody of that period—was always there, beating time with his hoop stick; and that question satisfactorily replied to, he thought, as there was no short cut to Shad Thames that way, he wouldn't trouble the landlady to say that he was coming.

Mrs. Higgs and Mr. Galbraith departed in quest of a room once more; but the more rooms they looked at, the more dissatisfied was Mr. Galbraith, and the more frivolous became his objections. He could not see anybody passing on this side of the way, and the street bent round too suddenly and cut off the landscape, and there wasn't room at that window for his table, and he could not hear anyone knocking at that height—could not tell Neal's knock from any one else's. He mystified the landladies who had not the clue to the one thread of thought running through these wild objections; they were anxious—terribly anxious some of them—to let their rooms, but there was the consolation of thinking that at least they had been spared much worry of mind on account of a mad lodger.

Mrs. Higgs and Mr. Galbraith were becoming very tired. Mr. Galbraith could not walk at the rapid rate in which Mrs. Higgs invariably indulged, and it tired the old servant to trudge on at the master's pace. She was agile, and always dashed through business.

"I don't know where to go," said Mrs. Higgs, wearily.

"Suppose—we work our way back into Fife Street, and see what that number one's like, Mrs. Higgs?"

"If I didn't think as much," said she in reply; "oh! dear, to think you are so artful!"

"There's nothing seems to suit me about here, you know."

"Ah! I know!" was the sententious answer.

They trudged their way back to Fife Street, Mrs. Higgs indulging in soliloquies about her back. She never remembered being so tired in her life. The wife of the railway porter was aroused from her domestic duties by Mrs. Higgs, with whom good-mornings were affectionately exchanged.

"This gentleman thinks of having a room this side of the way, or near here somewhere, Mrs. Stripe; can we see your 'partment?"

"To be sure."

It was the first-floor front-room—smaller than might have been anticipated, and full of corners, owing to the builder's frantic desire to get three rooms on a floor—cramped, low-ceilinged, ill-furnished, and smelling fustily.

"Ah that's something like a room!" said Mr. Galbraith, even to the amazement of the landlady, who, however, found breath to reply.

"Yes, Sir, it's a noble room!"

"And look here—here's a view, Mrs. Higgs!—why, I can see all down your street, and the scraper on the step, and the St. George's Road, too, with all the omnibuses!—why, how very cheerful to be sure!"

Mrs. Stripe inwardly resolved upon adding an extra sixpence to the weekly rent.

"It'll be handy for me to run across and see to you, until we've settled matters, certainly," said Mrs. Higgs; "and when you're dull, you can always come to us."

"Yes—yes, that I can."

The old gentleman took off his hat, set his cane in the corner, and proceeded to draw off his gloves.

"You won't stop here now?"

"Yes I shall—I'm tired—I shall take possession, and Mrs. Stripe will be good enough to cook me a chop, and to find a boy to bring the few things of mine from over the way. I don't think that I need trouble you any more, Mrs. Higgs, to-day. You can tell *them* where I am, and when they're so dis—posed—I shall—be very—glad—to—to—to see them!"

He flourished his handkerchief a little in the air before burying his face in it; and Mrs. Higgs shortly afterwards left him, wondering if it were for the best, and what Neal would think of it.

Mr. Galbraith recovered his equanimity before Mrs. Higgs had retired, and congratulated himself on the novelty of his position. He wondered also what Neal would say when he reached home, and whether the son would be very glad that the sire had gone away. It was a proper spirit that he had evinced, and he was somewhat proud of it.

His heart was very full, though, and when Mrs. Stripe brought in the chop, he sat before it, turned it over and over in his plate, stuck it on the points of his steel fork, and regarded it dismally; finally left it untouched, and crept back to the window.

He took his place there, with his back to Mrs. Higgs's house, and his face towards the St. George's Road. When Neal was at home, he should reverse positions—it was a very handy window! So this old man sat watching at his post, till the day died out, and the night came stealing into Fife Street.

CHAPTER VII.

"A HOUSE DIVIDED."

NEAL GALBRAITH, turning slowly the corner of Fife Street that winter's night, met with a surprise. He was coming on moodily from business, with his hands behind him, and his eyes bent downwards, when it met him. He had altered lately—but he had altered very much within the last four-and-twenty hours; the quick step and the bold, resolute face, looking forwards and fearing nothing in advance, were gone—the youth of the man had been dying out rapidly enough; but it seemed from his face that age had fallen on him now in earnest. He came along a man of forty, tall and unbent yet by advancing years, but full of care, that robbed him of that brightness which make men of two-score years look young still.

A vigorous tapping at the window of a house opposite, beginning in gentle fashion, and increasing in force as he passed by, startled him, but did not make him turn his head.

"Some fool, full of animal life—or drunk, perhaps—wishing to raise a laugh at my expense," thought Neal.

"Hi!—hi!—*Neal!*"

Neal stopped then, and looked with dismay at the open window of No. 1, Fife Street, and at some one gesticulating therefrom in the shadowy background.

His father's voice!—his father at that window!—what had happened during his absence to place him there

Neal crossed the road, and looked up.

"I'm so glad you have heard me, boy!" said Mr. Galbraith, from the open window; "do you mind coming up stairs a moment? I want to speak to you."

Neal, bewildered still, knocked at the door. Was it all a dream, full of the incongruities pertaining unto dreams—and when had it begun? Oh! if before last night, when he had found his wife with Tressider, how much to thank God for in waking!

Mrs. Stripe opened the door.

"I'm glad you've heard him, Sir—I thought he'd smash the windows," said the landlady; "and I do hope, Sir, he's not so very mad!"

"What!"

"We've allers called him the mad gentleman about here, and thought he'd something to do with the big place at the back—turned out incurable, perhaps."

"You should think about your own affairs," said Neal, before mounting the stairs, three at a time.

"Well—I'm sure!"

Mrs. Stripe slammed the street door, and went into her parlour. Neal Galbraith entered the room on the first-floor, and found his father in the dark there, sitting by the window, faintly illumined by the street lamp below.

"What is the meaning of this?" Neal asked, walking towards his father, taking his seat by his side, and placing his fingers on his wrist.

"I'll tell you presently—I want to talk to you about Carry first—about Tressider and her."

"Not to-night, please."

"But——"

"But if you will please to explain this extraordinary action on your part, I shall be grateful."

"I—I haven't gone mad again, Neal!" said the father, drawing his hand somewhat petulantly from his son's; "my pulse is as calm as your own, for that matter. This is my room—I've taken it for good. I'm going to live here. It's the wisest step I have ever made in my life."

"Are you tired of us?" asked Neal; "haven't you been happy with us?"

"I have been as happy as the days were long!" exclaimed Mr. Galbraith, forgetting all past differences; "you have been always kind to me; and she's tried pretty well, for a young woman. But I wasn't adding to the peace of either of you—though I didn't know it till this—morning."

"Then *she* told you?"

"Yes."

"Well!—well!"

It sounded like a wail over some faint hope of better times, that he had been fostering that day—a mournful cadence, which took away still further hopes with it.

"She is quick—wondrously quick—at retaliation!" he murmured, after a while; "she knows where to strike!"

"You mustn't blame her for this, Neal," urged the old man. "Don't, there's a good boy, have another *row* about me! I have gone away to stop all rows—and she didn't ask me to go, exactly."

"You have been driven away, Sir!—I can see that."

"No—this is my own thought. It's all of my own accord, and I was making her miserable, and then it got round to you. She said I—I had always stood between you, and that I had been a spy and an informer against her. Oh! dear, it was not right to say so much as that—and perhaps she did not mean it."

Neal clenched his hands in the darkness, and the face of the troubled man would have scared the father had the light fallen on it.

"She does not mean all she says, I believe," was the deep response, after another long pause. "Put on your hat."

"For what?"

"You must come back with me. I'll not have you stop here."

"It's only—it's only for a week, and then Mrs. Higgs is coming."

"How well and quickly it has all been arranged!" said Neal, scoffingly; "but I think that I have a voice in the matter, and that it will be heard. Come with me."

"No, Neal—never."

The old man put his arms behind him, and twined them through the back of the chair. For the first time he resisted his son's mandate, and faced him with an obduracy equal to his own.

"I ask you as a favour?"

"I can't grant it—I would rather stop here and die, than go back there again. Upon my soul, I would!"

Neal saw the futility of urging his father just then—the danger of asserting his will in the face of that dogged opposition. For once in his life, he saw what was best, and paused.

"I will come back late to-night, and ask you. Will you think seriously of this again?"

"Yes—yes, I will."

The old gentleman was glad to defer further argument.

"I'll think of it," he continued; "but it's a very cheerful room this, although it's rather dark just now, the landlady being backward with the lights. I can see all down Fife Street, Neal—and when you chance to look out of your window, I can nod at you. Besides, I'm not sulking with anybody, and you can come across when you like—and Carry, too—and I'll have tea with you every other Sunday—there! Why it's all as comfortable as possible!"

Neal listened, or feigned to listen, drumming idly with his fingers on the table. When his father had finished he rose.

"I shall be here again presently—think over my wishes as well as you can," he said.

"Are you going now?"

"Yes."

He went out of the room, and down stairs to the passage.

"Take up lights directly, please," he called, after tapping at the landlady's door—then he let himself out of the house, and crossed the road towards his home.

He walked along at that slow rate of progression from which his father had aroused him, but the face was darker still with shadow, or the night was blacker than Fife Street had ever known it. He held his hands behind him, and they griped each other hard; the compression of his lips told that he was suffering. Outside his door, he paused for awhile, thinking; then he drew the latch-key from his pocket, and let himself into the house.

"Again!" he muttered.

He closed the door behind him, and went up stairs. Mrs. Higgs opened the parlour door, and called to him.

"Mr. Neal—I——"

"I know. I have heard all," he answered, without stopping or looking behind him. Mrs. Higgs listened at her door, till she heard him enter the drawing-room, then she withdrew into her little parlour with a sigh.

"This is—very 'pressing to the spirits," she said, as she took up her needlework.

Neal entered the drawing-room, where the tea was set for him, and the candles lighted. In the easy chair by the fire—his father's chair, and in his father's place!—sat Carry, her hand supporting her head, her face averted from him. No movement as he came into the room—no look towards him—a statue cold as his heart!

He had not expected a welcome home that night—he had not wished it, perhaps—but the immobility of the figure by the fire wounded him for all that. And he did not know—he never knew—that she was only waiting for one word of kindness to become his wife again.

He sat down at the table, the man aggrieved—the man in the right till then, perhaps—and pushed the tea-tray back to make room for his elbow. Then he sat there for a while, as silent as his wife. Carry was the first to break upon a stillness that finally became more painful than last night's storm.

"Have you had tea?"

"I do not want any."

Carry mustered courage to speak again; she was not so strong as yesternight. God help her!—not so strong in mind or body!

"Your father——"

Neal broke in abruptly here. He checked her more by the darkling look upon his face than by any harshness or anger in his tones.

His voice was deep, firm, and unutterably sad, speaking of a mind made up to meet the worst, and of no hope in him for anything better or brighter from that day. If he had spoken to her with last night's vehemence, she could have stood her ground. For that she had been prepared, not for this new hard demeanour, which rendered him impenetrable. She could not speak of her regrets in the face of his invulnerability.

"I ask your silence concerning my father," he said; "you have thought fit to affright him from this house—wreaking a woman's malice on one who has always wished you well. You could not have struck more surely, or taken a better means to wound me—we will call this day successful!"

"I did not ask him to go—I did not care whether he remained or not. It was all one to me."

"I cared," said Neal, with emphasis.

"More for him than for me—always!" retorted Carry; "you can not lay your hand upon your heart and say it would not have pleased you more to find him here, and learn that I was gone away for ever?"

Neal did not reply, and Carry, irritated by his silence, cried—

"Answer that!"

"It would have been better, perhaps, for us all," came the hollow response at last.

Carry sank back in her chair as though a pistol shot had struck her, and lay there like a dead woman, to whom, by a miracle, an awful sense of mental suffering remained. She did not cry; she did not feel an impulse to break forth into her old passions; she was very calm and cold; she could note the pattern into which the fire had shaped itself, the position of the fire-irons, the red ashes falling beneath the grate, the kettle hissing at her, a scrap of ribbon in the fender, and Mrs. Higgs's black cat reaching over, and trying to touch it with her paw. To note all this, and yet to feel that the very commonplaces of home were part and parcel of her suffering, rendering her desolation more acute.

Yes, it was desolation! She knew that now; she accepted it as final. This man whom she had chosen for her husband—this man only one and twenty years of age—was unforgiving and relentless. She had been wrong, but he would not offer pardon—for the one fault of her life he neither asked nor wished for atonement. He was proud of his own misery.

"Yes, it would have been better, Neal," she answered as bitterly as himself.

The answer came long afterwards, but Neal accepted it. He had not forgotten his last words, but had brooded upon them, and thought of all that might have been had she been true to him, until Carry broke the silence.

"I know it," said Neal in response—"I see that now."

"Our marriage was a mistake," murmured Carry.

"A life's mistake! God forgive our rashness, for He did not intend us for each other."

Carry winced again, but her outward demeanour betrayed no emotion. Like her husband, she had ossified, she thought.

"I accept the result—it is natural," continued Neal; "I do not look from this night for any happiness or peace. We are eternally apart."

"Be it so—it is your wish."

"I say that it is the natural result," corrected Neal; "what my wishes are, surely cannot affect my wife. They lie as apart from hers, as our characters—both diverge, and no semblance of affection between us can alter that."

"You think the worst of me?"

"No."

"You mistrust me, then—Neal?"

"Yes."

"You are in doubt—you, my husband!—whether I am innocent!"

"You are guilty in thought—and I cannot forgive it. In all my life, I will *not* forgive that."

"I deny it."

"I will be silent," he continued, not heeding her denial, "but I will take no consolation from one doubt. I will be silent, for this house's peace—but I will forget not, nor forgive."

"I will go, then."

"You are free to act," said Neal; "I will not raise one finger to thwart you. Go where your heart prompts you, if you will—I shall be no more unhappy than I am."

"You will be happier!" cried Carry, recovering from her syncope, "for you will be free."

"Free!" echoed Neal, bitterly. The truth that was wailed forth in that one word was misinterpreted. But a life crossed by the storm is on a sea of misgivings, and judges, how often, for the worst!

"If you were a rich man, Neal," said Carry, vehemently, "you would propose a separation. Seeing no happiness ahead, it would be your wish?" she asked.

"I am not a rich man. I am in no mood for discussion of abstract questions, with a woman who has no sense of self-respect."

"I ask you—give me my answer."

Neal looked at her for the first time that evening. She had half risen, and with her hands clutching the sides of the chair, was looking at him with an intensity of eagerness. He might have seen the truth then in his turn, but his heart was heavy, and he was groping in the dark still. He could not spare her one word in the bitter lesson he was teaching her.

"If I were rich—I would suggest a separation. It would be better for me; if I found no happiness, there might, at least, by a strong effort, come peace."

"And happiness too—with another whom you might love. Add that!"

"I will add nothing more. We are bound together for—worse, and there's an end of it."

"No—the end is coming."

Neal look at her again—he did not understand her, and there was nothing new in her looks to set him right.

For a while—a long while this time—silence was maintained between them. The fire died out, and the clock down stairs struck more than once before Neal rose.

"I am going across the street, to induce my father to return here," said Neal.

"Very well."

Carry looked towards him as he went out of the room, but he did not turn his head. Full of his wounded pride, he walked away sorrowfully, but sternly; and as he went out of the house, and the street door closed, Carry, with a wild light in her eyes, sprang to her feet.

"It would be better for him," she said; "he owns it. He is tired of me. He never loved me. He will never forget or forgive. Cruel!—cruel!—cruel!"

She paced the room once or twice, and then, taking the lamp from the table, went up stairs, looking flushed and angry. In her room, she paused again, and pressed her hands to her temples, after her father-in-law's fashion, pushing back her fair hair behind her ears.

"I stand in his way—he hates me—I will go."

That new hardness of expression, which she had copied from her husband's looks, set in once more; it was an old-looking face, on which the lamp-light fell in that lonely room.

"I will go," she said again, this time more firmly.

Then she snatched up her bonnet and shawl from the bed, and put them on hastily, glancing at her white face in the dressing-glass, and scared not by its wildness. She did not stay to reason—to reflect upon her future course. She had resolved to go away; her own wish now was to leave that ill-fated house, and never be heard of more. Perhaps Neal might be sorry after she had gone—it would be a lesson to him, then; and in the future his hard words might turn upon himself. He had not spared her; he could have no worse opinion of her than he now possessed; let her go away, and make him happy by her going. With him she could not stay—better death than life with Neal now, she thought. Better death than life at all.

She was seized with a wild fear that she should be balked in her flight, and made hasty preparations—gathering together a mass of articles from the drawers, and then flinging all away from her, and going out of the room empty-handed.

Down stairs in the old sitting-room for the last time. The still small voice whispered "Stay!" then, but she took no heed. She was unloved, and would not stay—in the world she should find more sympathy than in that house.

Haunted by this last thought, she turned away and went stealthily down stairs. Not so stealthily, but Mrs. Higgs, warned of her descent, met her in the passage.

"Good lor!—how scared you look, Carry! Another quarrel, then?"

"Yes—the last, aunt."

"Where are you going?"

"Out—I shall be back presently. Don't stand in my way, please—I'm desperate."

"She's mad!—she's mad!"

Carry had wrenched open the door, and sent it back against the wall with a clashing noise, that reverberated through Fife Street.

Mrs. Higgs made a dash at her shawl, but Carry eluded her grasp, darted out into the wintry night, and ran wildly up the street.

"Carry!—NEAL!" cried Mrs. Higgs, rooted to the spot, until it was too late.

Then she ran bare-headed up the street also, leaving the door open.

But it was too late. The dark figure of the woman sick of home had vanished in the greater darkness, and in the men and women walking past the end of Fife Street, there was no trace of Carry. Mrs. Higgs crossed the road to No 1, and knocked. Neal came into the passage at the same time.

"Oh! Master Neal!—I think she's gone away for ever."

"Hush, woman!—what do you mean?"

They went out of the house, and crossed the road together.

"Won't you see after her at once, Sir?" asked Mrs. Higgs.

"She will come back presently."

"Oh! I think——"

"Silence, my old friend! This is a needless alarm. She will come back, I say."

But even in that hour he did not believe it. He guessed the truth then, as he knew it afterwards. She had followed her wishes, and his own; they were from that night irrevocably sundered.

He went into his room, and sat down in the chair she had quitted, Mrs. Higgs following him, wringing her hands piteously.

"Won't you go after her?"

"She will come back, I tell you."

"No—no, she won't! I saw it in her face."

"Then let her keep away. Of her own free will she parts from me—preferring her woman's shame to my affection. I'll not stir to save her."

"You're mad too—like your father."

"Very likely."

"I'll go myself after her—I'll go to Mount Gardens, where that fellow used to live—that 'Essider."

"Go where you like."

Neal turned his back upon her, and refused to move. If his wife sought that man, and left her home for *his* sake—why, she was not worth one effort to restrain. He took no heed of Mrs. Higgs's hasty departure, but sat struggling to be calm, vainly endeavouring to believe that it was all folly, and that Carry would

presently come back. Why, she could not have been gone half an hour yet—and the shops were not closed. Early in the week she had spoken of a new bonnet—what folly on his part, and what madness on Mrs. Higgs'!

He went up stairs, and stood in the doorway, looking at the confusion of dress left about the room by Carry. His keen eye detected a torn strip of paper on the floor; he stooped and picked it up.

A fragment of a letter that he had never seen, in Tressider's handwriting—addressed to Carry, his wife. He held it at arm's length, and read it.

“Star Hotel, Liverpool, July 8th, 18—

“DEAREST CARRY,

“Will you be very much surprised . . . still dearest Carry to me. I ignore more of each other . . . dear to each other, to begin life afresh. . . I don't like to think that we ever came to the resolution . . . our engagement. I professed Full of hope, I am coming back . . . I write in advance . . . I love you more passionately than ever . . . your whole future happy . . . sanguine of a bright life . . . answer . . . write a line to me at Liverpool at once.

“Yours for ever affectionately,
“WALTER TRESSIDER.”

These, the fragments of fact, left from a torn missive, but adding to an awful suspicion. Neal let the paper drop from his hand again, and stood staring where it had fallen, a basilisk in his path.

“Well, let her go!” he said; “she is not worth seeking—I will not stir.”

He went back to the drawing-room, and shut himself in with his ghastly thoughts. The horror of it all met him there—the desolation of his new life—the shipwreck of his home, happiness, and honour. He could not sit there and let the awful truths assail him. He must be stirring—he would go after Tressider also, and kill the villain.

As he sprang up, a knocking at the street-door startled him—made his heart beat like a frightened child's.

“It's Carry's knock—it's all a mistake, thank God!” he muttered to himself.

He went down stairs, his heart still plunging, and opened the door. The cold night air rushed at him, and extinguished the light in his hand. A voice from the darkness in the streets without—a man's voice—said:

"Neal!"

"Mr. Pike!" responded Neal, dreamily.

"I couldn't rest—I couldn't stay till Monday! It's all right!"

"All right!—what?"

"The cold blast. We're successful, and our fortune's made."

THE END OF BOOK THE FOURTH.

BOOK V.

ADRIFT.

CHAPTER I.

A WORSE ESTATE.

THERE are some troubles from which a man never recovers. The shock falls, and is borne up against ; but he who has stood the conflict, remains no longer the same. He is changed with the cares that have come to him.

It was so with Neal Galbraith. Naturally of a saturnine disposition, looking at life seriously, and facing life with grave responsibilities, it was not to be imagined that his trouble would not seriously affect him. He was not young in thought, when affliction met him full-front, and he stood benighted ere his day was done. He could not shake his burden from him, or regard it lightly ; he hardened very much, and with that hardening process were bound up the better thoughts which had been expanding in him. He became stern and uncharitable, shutting his eyes to the good in the world, and believing in the world's evil. Here and there, perhaps, a good man and woman—he would grant that—but good from their very simpleness, which set them apart from people with minds above their level. Good from their ignorance of the world—their want of experience in the world's temptations—passively good, like Pike and his niece, who thought creation confined to a few specimens of chapel-folk.

Neal knew better. He was a man of the world, worldly at two-and-twenty years of age !—a scoffer and a sceptic ! Fifteen months had passed since his wife had left her home—but time had brought no peace to him. By an effort, when he was alone, it might, he had implied to the weak, wilful woman, who had taken him at his word, and left him desolate ! But peace came not, only an intense feeling that God had not treated him well, the worst of feelings for a man to nurse, setting his puny will against His will that it should come to pass ! Neal was a silent man, who, if he brooded on his wrongs, still seldom gave voice to them. How often he thought of his affliction—of his wife, and of the days when he dreamed of happiness with her, it was difficult to guess from the set features which had aged him with their immobility. Fifteen months had brought him independence, but he was not grateful for it ; the scheme at which he, his father and Pike had worked so long, had ended not alone in success, but in that pecuniary emolument which waits so seldom on success in these times.

It had been a great discovery, and in Pike's hands it led to

independence for the Galbraiths and himself. It brought large sums of money in from wealthy firms, as though the old conspiracy had weighed upon the minds of the trade, and the chance of reparation was worth leaping at. Pike was a man in the trade, and knew its members—and the members of that body saw huge profits to be made by the invention, and magnanimously adopted it—and paid for it.

All this an exception to the rules governing business-life; the law of patent in the poor man's hands, but the money which defeats it and fights against the right, in the hands of the capitalists. All this not quite the offspring of a distorted imagination, but a something very near the truth, and which ended like a tragedy. A something on which we based the trade-life of this story, and a something happening every day, in this world of honourable traders.

In fifteen months, then, Neal had become, if not a rich man, at least a man independent of the world; he had given up business, and his clerkship at Mr. Pike's; he had formally declined an offer of partnership, as formally tendered him by the only man in whom he had implicit faith.

"I have no ambition to make a large fortune," Neal said, after thanking Mr. Pike for his offer; "my share of the patent will place me above want, and bring me in a few hundreds a year. That is enough for me, and I have no one to save money for."

"You will not idle time away all your life, because one stroke of luck has fallen to your share?"

"I shall devote a great deal of my time to my father—when he dies, I shall travel."

"No, you will set to work presently, I am sure, Neal. Yours should not be a profitless life, because——"

Neal hastened to interrupt him.

"Because I have not had it all my own way—perhaps not. I will call upon you at an early day and argue the matter with you."

But Neal never called, and it was always Mr. Pike who sought out his old friend, and endeavoured to arouse him from his lethargy.

Neal was not to be roused, however; he had sketched out his career, and he intended to abide by it. He had no wish to become rich; no belief that he should ever be happy; no desire to settle down and strive for a content hitherto denied him. For he was unsettled still—terribly unsettled—for all that gravity, which deceived others, and was not assumed by himself. It spoke of an awful repose, whilst it stood but as a sign of utter indifference. He was a man who had lost faith in God—and in woman. To have been so completely made a dupe, was to prove to him that there was nothing to be trusted in. All was vanity and vexation of spirit.

On that night when Carry ran away, and Pike brought good news to Fife Street, Neal, remembering Tressider's address, had gone to

Mount Gardens, Lambeth, after Mrs. Higgs. Tressider had left that day for Australia, and Neal could believe that it had been all part of a plan on Carry's part to join the actor. Even the expulsion of his father was to blind him to results, and he came home full of that thought, resolved to let her go, as unworthy of any effort of his own to bring her back. She had chosen her fate, and fled with him whom she had loved before Neal's time—so be it; it was his disgrace, and he accepted it.

And yet he *did* think now and then that he was wrong—and that his own harshness had driven his wife from home. That night when he went a second time to his father's lodgings, he heard from Mr. Galbraith the true history of yesterday's incidents—how Carry had confronted Tressider, and shamed him; and he remembered it at times still, though her name never escaped him, and it was to bring a furrow to his brow to hear it mentioned by others. But, as time stole on, he had less generous thoughts; she had gone away from home in defiance of him, forgetful of her marriage vow, and of her wifely duties, and they were for ever after that separated by a gulf which no love could bridge over. For that last act, no excuse—whatever had gone before, and might have been explained in a time for sober reasoning, was not worth dwelling upon in the days that faced him then. Tressider had gone abroad that day—Mr. and Mrs. Webber had been surprised in Shepherd Street by Mrs. Higgs, and Carry had not sought their help—she had deliberately chosen her fate, and his.

Neal had removed from Fife Street, leaving no sign behind him. He had taken his father to a little villa at Streatham, and constituted Mrs. Higgs his housekeeper.

"You were always a good servant and a true friend," he said to her; "devote yourself to my father's comfort, until I am fit to be his companion again. Presently I shall be a different man."

"Ah! very soon, I hope, Master Neal."

"Don't worry me—don't preach to me—leave me to myself, and I shall come round. Why, I am young still!"

"That you are."

But he consoled not Mrs. Higgs any more than himself—for the hope in his words was not seconded by any hope in his voice or his face. He was not a man stricken down at the outset of life, but a man with all hopes perverted. He was a young man to bear so heavy a load, perhaps—but if he had thought more often of his own share in his discomfiture, it would have been the better for him.

Mr. Pike never relaxed in his uphill efforts to make a different man of Neal. Baffled often—not always spared the curt reply or ironical rejoinder, so trying to him who speaks in good faith—still Mr. Pike plodded on in Neal's cause, in much the same manner as he plodded on in business. Not very brilliant or original in ideas, but patient, persevering, and always meaning well.

Mr. Pike had removed from Crow Street to Hackney Road, a place handy for his business, convenient to his chapel, and a change for the better, so far as regarded locality. The distance between him and Neal did not deter him from frequent visits; in the "long evenings" he was at Neal's house once a week, towards the winter he came less often; as the spring veered round again—it was getting on for March, and two years since Neal's wedding-day—he began to appear with his old regularity.

Neal bore with him, rather than expressed any delight at his comings and goings. Fifteen months' isolation had not rendered him more complaisant, or reconciled him to his lot. And yet he feigned to be resigned.

"I wish that you would come to Hackney Road now and then, Neal," urged Mr. Pike, for the eleventh time that year, "it's just as if you had grown tired of Addie and me, or that we had offended you in some way."

"I am not very good company just now," Neal replied; "we have no experiments to prosecute, and I should only be a nuisance to you."

"Try," replied Pike.

"Not just yet."

"It's a long time since you have seen Addie. You would not believe how she has improved, or what a good little woman she is."

"I can believe it, Mr. Pike. She was brought up by a good man, true and simple-hearted. If she marry a man like herself, one of her own class, she will be very happy all her life."

"I'm not thinking of her marrying yet a while."

"No. It will be losing an only daughter when the time comes."

Neal would relapse into thought again, and leave his father to the duties of host—his father, gentle and forbearing now, stronger perhaps in mind, if weaker in body. There was no one to cross the even tenor of old Mr. Galbraith's way, he had risen in the world too, and was happy. He had received his share of the patent's value, and the satisfaction of having invented or originated something new, had brought back almost his own self.

Later in the evening, Neal would accompany Mr. Pike part of the way homewards—occasionally all the way, pausing at the corner of the terrace in which Mr. Pike's new house was situated, and shaking his head at all inducements to enter.

"No—it is late—some other time."

"Well, as it is late, I'll not press you. But you will come soon."

"Yes."

Neal always promised that. It saved discussion and dismissed the subject. But he had no love for the quiet home of the Pikes,

and it was not aversion to society that kept him away. There were strange dashes at life—life in its worst aspect—that beset Neal, for all his stoicism. It was the reaction that hurled him from the solitariness of his position, and took him recklessly into temptation. It was that terribly unsettled state, which he could mask so well by his grave looks, that led him on. Scarcely into temptation, for he was temptation-proof to all appearance; he passed scathless in the midst of vice, but he sought it for its distraction, and looked about him with a kind of wondering interest at the evil which seethed round him.

When they thought at Streatham that he was in his bed, he had let himself out of the house, and gone wandering to West End cafés, or to suburban gardens, where effrontery in its finest feathers plied its trade and scoffed at all that was virtuous under heaven. Neal's face became known in these haunts, but scarcely Neal. He passed through them, interested in the whirligig of life, wherein fools were swallowed up, and knaves met knaves and made high holiday—but it was always with the same stern looks or scornful cynicism. Men stared at him—habitués of such places—and wondered what he wanted there. Women were suspicious of that grave face, and thought at first that he had come to preach to them—until he came too often, and said too little. Now and then a woman of greater boldness than the rest would face him with a wanton's jest, but he would tell her, with a scorn that even touched *her* pride, that time was wasted on him, and she had better leave him to himself. He became a riddle at last, which people did not care to solve; it was only on chance occasions that the mistake occurred of intruding on his reverie.

That mistake occurred on the night he pleaded want of time for going home with Pike, and then turned westward. He had called a cab, and been driven to the cafés—the Haymarket dens that a wise legislature has thought fit to look after lately, and looks after with one eye shut.

He repaired to his old haunt, and sat in the corner of a long room—bright and garish with its lights and mirrors, and hideous with its company. He had one favourite corner there, where he would remain for hours—even till the daylight shamed him—with his coffee untasted on the marble table before him. He smoked constantly now, and as he puffed away cigar after cigar, he watched human nature in its worst phase, and thought more uncharitably than ever. Occasionally he was startled by men whom he had known, and who had been pointed out to him as good and honourable men—entering into life there—and he shrugged his shoulders, as the veil dropped from their hypocrisies. It was the same all the world over, and no man was better than his fellow-men; only in such places as these could life be seen—life with its mask off, and its face of cupidity undisguised for the nonce.

On that night he parted with Pike last, a woman, more bold than usual, or more curious, or more drunk with wine, or all three together, dropped into a chair facing the table at which he sat, and stared hard at him. Neal had seen this woman, in all her wealth of wardrobe, twenty times at least—a handsome black-eyed girl, who should have been still at her mother's side.

"What the deuce have you got to think about in this place, old fellow?" she said familiarly.

"About many things."

"I should like to know what you want here so often—sometimes I fancy it's the devil sitting in a corner, waiting to pick the worst of us out?"

"Perhaps it is."

"Take me, then—I don't care how soon—not I!"

"Ask your God to take you in his mercy—not the devil," said Neal.

"Oh! don't come that here!—that won't do, you know!"

"I don't ask you to listen to me."

"No, but I don't want to hear that cant. Will you treat us to some cherry-brandy?"

"No."

"Will you tell me what you want here?"

"I am expecting some one."

"A woman?"

"Yes."

"Oh! that's a good one!—that's it then!" she said, rising half jealously; even these castaways are strangely jealous; "well, you've waited long enough."

"She will come in time!"

Neal believed that, and for that, as betrayed in his answer to the woman, he was waiting. For that he wandered to and fro amidst the haunts which decent men knew nought of, and bided his time for the moral of the story. What he would do, what he would say, whether he should speak to her, he never told himself—but there was a strange infatuation in the motive which set him in these places, and filled him with the conviction that he should meet *her* there. Now and then a figure like Carry's, a face like his young wife's, made his heart collapse with a sudden fear that it was she—but the mistake was perceived at the second glance, and it was only a new face not hers! With every night new faces—the tide was never still that cast them on the barren sands.

At times, also, the face and figure of Tressider, but not Tressider, caused him to clench his hands and hold his breath. Was he waiting for him too?—nursing, in that heart full of uncharitableness, a deadly hate, whence might evolve serious consequences? It was possible; for neither man nor woman escaped his vigilant glance, and as time stole on he came more frequently, and evinced more interest in the show.

These places were his distraction, and there *was* temptation therein, though he knew it not. He was unfitting himself more and more for the home where he had looked for peace—it was the worst of schools wherein to learn indifference to misfortune. It was the surest and broadest road to ruin—and yet, with confidence in himself and in his apathy, he took his way thereon.

CHAPTER II.

BROKEN UP.

It was March at last, and the anniversary of Neal's wedding-day had been passed silently by, when a visitor arrived at Edleigh Villa. A visitor who scared Mrs. Higgs by his general appearance, his equipage, his alteration in demeanour.

"Good lor!—*is* that you!" she exclaimed from the top step; "I can't believe it yet a while!"

"Don't, if you like, Marm—nobody asked you."

Yes, it was he—it was his voice, at least—the voice of Mr. Webber, Carriage-Breaker, of Shepherd Street.

Mrs. Higgs stood and gasped still. She had not visited Shepherd Street since the night of Carry's flight, when Mr. Webber had exulted in the result of all his doleful prophecies, and her sister Johannah had feigned to think that it was everybody's fault but hers, she having done her duty all her life, and everybody, but herself, having persistently neglected it. Mrs. Higgs had seen the beginning of a quarrel between Mr. Webber and his better-half, and had hastened away, heart-broken, before the storm burst forth. She had thought to have seen the last of her relations then; and here was Webber the boisterous, at her gate in a Bath-chair; and surely here was Mrs. Webber, in the same shabby silk, advancing up the garden-path.

"Now, do you want any help, Webber?" his wife asked sharply.

And to have seen the scared look of Mr. Webber was as good as a play of retributive justice, in three acts and twelve tableaux.

"No—not yours. You're too rough by half—here, Sampson, lend a hand!"

Sampson, the man who had dragged him thither, lent a hand accordingly, and Mr. Webber, very much shrunken, very feeble on one side and out of all shape on the other, was hauled out of his Bath-chair and assisted up the steps into the hall.

"Where's your master, Mrs. Higgs?"

"My young master?"

"Yes—the man who married Carry."

Mr. Webber attempted still his old manner—and occasionally there rang out the trumpet tones of defiance to everything and everybody; but time had got the better of this man, and taken him unawares. He had lost that brute strength, which gave such brute force to his past demeanour, and a sudden blow of fate had broken him up, like one of his own carriages.

"He's at home. I scarcely know if he will see you, Webber."

"Ask him, please."

Webber suddenly became submissive—he was a man of many moods now, and Mrs. Higgs wondered more and more.

"You've been brought very low, Webber, to do the humble in this fashion," she said, as he was landed on a chair in the hall, and propped somewhat carelessly against the wall.

"It's a damned Guy Fawkes fashion!—aint it, Mrs. Higgs?" he said savagely; "no one knows that better than I do. I did not deserve it—I always paid my way, and acted up to the mark—and it's precious hard!"

"It was a stroke that took him as he was going down stairs, swearing at me for being late with breakfast," explained Mrs. Webber. "It was like a judgment."

"You're a judgment!" retorted Mr. W.

"And now look what a hobject he is, Hannah," said Mrs. W.; "a big, strong man as he was only six months back. Like a horse for strength."

"Ah! I was," sighed Mr. Webber.

"He used to brag of living all of us out—Joe, Carry, and me, and now he'll go before the lot of us—see if he don't."

"Oh! what a horrible woman you are," said Mr. Webber with a groan.

"And never grateful—not a mite of that, bless you. And never sorry for all the trouble that he is. Always on the work and fidget—aren't you?"

"Well I may be."

"The doctor says he'll have another stroke if he goes on so; and that'll take him off, see if it don't—clean."

"It'll be the worst day's work for you, if it does," he said, implying by his vindictive nod towards her that he should hold her responsible for that calamity.

"If you'll wait a moment, I'll speak to Master Neal," said Mrs. Higgs.

"Ah! do—tell him I've been all day coming up here after him, for this fellow crawls like a crab."

"See what a hill it is," grumbled the man.

"But see what wheels you've got," said Webber; "didn't you pick the best out in the place for that confounded match-box?—didn't you knock it up just as you liked, you——"

"You'll be boxed up nicely enough presently, Webber, if you give way to tantrums. I know you will," reminded his wife.

"What's the fellow aggravating me for?"

The fellow—one of Mr. Webber's own men—enlisted into special service sorely against his will, retired into the front garden, and sat on the edge of his Bath chair. Mrs. Webber and husband faced each other in the hall.

"Where has the money come from to keep this place up?" asked the carriage breaker sullenly—"I thought he'd come to beggary."

"Ah! so did I."

"And here's a pretty place—and she to run away like a fool—there's no making out my children."

"Keep quiet, will you, and don't talk so much."

Mr. Webber cowered when his wife spoke sharply. He was in her hands; he was indebted to her for all attention now—the tables were turned; she reigned paramount, and he could but gnash his teeth at the mutation. She had been so quick to see her advantage, too, and, although she did not treat him badly, and knew, after a fashion, her duty as a wife, still she was not a woman full of kindness, or mindful of his feelings, as Mrs. Higgs had not been slow to perceive that morning. But then Johannah had never had very fine feelings, or she would have scarcely have succumbed to the blandishments—far from tender in the best days—of Mr. Webber. Mrs. Higgs, meanwhile, had repaired to a room at the back of the house—a room looking on the garden, and called Neal's study, though what Neal studied there but his wrongs, it was difficult to guess.

Mr. Galbraith was sitting there with his son, trying to interest him in some new plans, upon which he had been lately occupied. Both looked up as Mrs. Higgs entered after the preliminary rap.

"Here's some odd visitors to-day, at any rate."

"Visitors for us?" said Neal—"who comes here that we care to see at this hour?"

"It's Mr. Webber—and his wife—from Shepherd Street."

Neal was silent for a time, but he did not betray any further surprise.

"What do they want?" he asked at last.

"I don't know—they haven't said."

"I have nothing in common with them—nothing that makes such people welcome here. Tell them so."

"I will, if you wish it. But——"

"But what, Mrs. Higgs?"

"But I don't think any harm could come of seeing them, and, mayhap, good might."

"Impossible!"

Neal did not repeat his uncourteous message, and Mrs. Higgs withdrew presently to reappear, ushering in Mr. and Mrs. Webber

arm-in-arm. Mrs. W led Mr. Webber with difficulty to a chair, and then sat down by his side. Neal slightly moved his head to the "Good-day to you" of the carriage-breaker, and then followed a silence that there seemed some difficulty in again disturbing.

"I never thought," Mr. Webber said at last, "that I should have taken the trouble to come after you all this way, but times have altered very much. I'm not the man I was—I'm not as strong as that old man there, who's the very chap that pelted me with bread once. Good Gord! how well he wears."

"I—I never pelted anybody," said the amazed Mr. Galbraith.

"Ah! you weren't accountable for your actions then, old gentleman."

"Father, will you leave us?" suggested Neal; "this is a man who was never pleasant company. And now, Sir," he added, when Mr. Galbraith had followed Mrs. Higgs from the room, "will you tell me what you want in this house?"

"I know it's a liberty," said Mr. Webber, suddenly submissive, "but you'll look over it for once, on account of my affliction. I shan't come here again, I dare say."

"I dare say not," said Neal, drily.

"I shouldn't have thought of coming here a year ago," he whined; "I was as strong as a house then, and didn't care for anybody. But I've been floored, and I'm not like myself; and there's only this tiresome old woman to make my life a misery."

"That's his gratitude, Mr. Galbraith. You allers knew how grateful he was."

"Why, she can hardly read and write, Sir," explained Mr. Webber. "I married her with all her ignorance in full blow, and now I see the fool I was. When I wasn't in this—this cursed condition," he added, with fretful vehemence, "it was different, for I could find my own amusement in my business and loan offices, but to sit at home all day with this dreary wretch for company."

"Never mind my feelings, Webber," said his wife; "you never did—you never will. Go on, my man."

"I don't think you mind my feelings much."

"You'll be sorry for all this when you're brought lower. And lower than this you'll come, depend upon it."

"If it depended upon you, no doubt I should. You'd like me dead, and all the money in your hands, wouldn't you?"

"I'd like you to behave yourself just now—if you want any attention from me."

"That's how she domineers, Sir," said Mr. Webber, appealingly. "She breaks my spirit with her ways. I hate a domineering disposition—it's galling, Mr. Galbraith, very galling."

And Mr. Webber actually wiped his eyes with the back of one shaking hand. Neal regarded him with curiosity.

"What do you want with me?"

"Look here, Sir," he said, earnestly, "I want my daughter Carry back."

Neal half rose in his chair, and then sat down again. What did the man mean by coming here and mentioning a name, upon which his solemn interdict was set? Was not the husband's shame deep and lasting enough, without dragging that name to the daylight? He repressed his answer for awhile, and looked steadily at the man who had ever opposed his pursuit of Carry. Neal had defeated him, but his victory had cost him dearly. If that man had had his way, how much better for all now! What a different and brighter life for everybody!

"I want my daughter Carry back," implored Mr. Webber, in tones more earnest and new; "I want her back to take care of me, and make home a different place. I aint the man I was, Sir."

Strange reiteration of this fact, easy to be seen, as though even with the evidence of his break down the confirmation of his word was needed. The world would not believe that he, Webber, of Shepherd Street, had fallen so low, without his own assertion—a man like him, who had known no meekness, or let any domestic calamity affect *him*. Why, his wife was an idiot, his son would have broken most fathers' hearts, and his daughter had married in wilful disobedience to his wishes, and he had not cared one rap. He had shaken them off his mind, and kept to carriage-breaking, and money-making, without much thought of the past; he had never forgiven his children, or cared about their well-doing—and yet all this philosophy had gone out of gear when he was struck at with the rest.

"I know not anything of your daughter, Mr. Webber—neither do I wish to know."

"Hasn't she written?—has not anybody written telling you where she might be found?"

"No."

"I wouldn't mind her goings on, or what she had done, or what she was, so that she came back to me. After all, she was the only one who ever understood me—and what a nurse she would make me."

"The trouble she'd take off my shoulders too," added Mrs. Webber.

"Ah! you only think of yourself," said the husband; "that's like you. But I think of Carry, hard up for a home perhaps, and knowing not that there's a home for her whenever she likes to come, and a father and mother waiting for her, to let her have her own way—which she always liked so much, poor thing. I thought you might have known, Sir; and though you aint the man to forgive anything, yet you might have let me know."

"She is in Australia, probably," said Neal, coolly.

"She was such a loving, good sort of girl, when she had her own

way," reflected Mr. Webber. "Lor', to hear her laugh when she was happy. I always checked it, because I didn't like people laughing about the house then, and singing and making all kinds of noises, but I wish I had the chance of hearing 'em now."

"Your chance has gone, like mine," said Neal. "You did not understand her, and she did not understand me, and so she fled both homes like a pestilence. But you were a fool to let her have me. You should have taken her away when she was firm, and kept her from me. You trained her up to evil and deceit, and then cast her off, to bring evil into honest homes. Begone—get from my house—you offend me by your presence here."

Neal had lost his self-possession, but it was momentary. The pent-up passion of his nature was compressed again and he said an instant afterwards, and before Mr. Webber had recovered from Neal's attack,

"I cannot enlighten you as to your daughter's actions, and therefore, need not detain you any longer. I am not well to-day—you will excuse any excitement on my part."

Mrs. Webber rose, and made preparations for hauling up her lord and husband. She turned to Neal, and shook her ghastly head at him to and fro, half sorrowfully, half reproachfully.

"If you had knowed her natur' better, or had been more kind and gentle—which we never was, God forgive us!—she might have been here now, a wife and mother in your house, a comfort to you and me. I see now—old woman as I am—where we was wrong, and I think we're all to blame a little."

"Her own fault," murmured Neal.

"When Tressider didn't know that she was married, and wrote to her to have him——"

"When was that?" interrupted Neal.

"The eighth of July, 18—; it came on a Friday morning and brought ill-luck enough. I thought that if it had come earlier, she might have had him and been happy with him, for he was good-tempered and kind, at all events."

"And I was not—well, it is not worth discussing now."

"No. Come up, Webber," she said, addressing him in donkey-driver fashion; "you'll sit maundering all day there—and a minute lost was a thing to be growled at and swore at hard enough once. Are you ready—or are you not?"

"I'm ready. What are you in such a hurry about?"

"The *gentleman* wants us gone," she said ironically.

"I'm trying to think of what else I wanted to say, but that infernal shock wouldn't even let my brains alone—oh! now I recollect."

He had risen and was hanging by Mrs. Webber's arm—his ponderosity, or dead weight, almost too much for her, though she clutched his hand with both of hers. He looked appealingly at Neal again.

"You needn't be too hard upon her when she comes back here and asks to be taken in. Before you shut the door in her face—as you, her husband, may feel it right to do, and I don't blame you—tell her that I aint the man I was, and don't care what she is, so that she comes back. I'm broken up, Sir."

Neal moved his head, as though he implied assent to this man's request, and Mr. Webber thanked him with a grave humility.

Husband and wife had scuffled to the door, when they paused again. Mrs. Webber had another word to say.

"Carry was allers a high sperited girl—wus for her that was—but she never meant no harm in my time. If she's changed, you changed her, I'm inclined to think."

"Madam, you must think what you will. This is a subject that I never dwell on—that I shut out," he added with an impatient gesture.

"And I do have a fancy, now and then, that she's with Joe, and not with that play-acting feller. She and Joe—both madcaps in their way—were fond of each other, and always inclined to help each other. If I only knew where Joe had got to."

"Joe's a bad one," affirmed Mr. Webber, not all forgiveness yet; "he's not worth thinking about. Carry with *him*, indeed!"

"And if her brother took care on her, Sir——" began Mrs. Webber, when Neal interrupted her again.

"There is no explaining a wife's absence from her husband's home, —I resent any excuse for that—I brand her guilty under any circumstances."

"But I'm her mother, Sir—and I wouldn't. I was not thinking of what *your* pride would do—not I."

"And, with a pride that even gave a dignity to this ignorant woman's speech, she and her husband left the lonely man. Neal went to the door and locked it after them. He did not desire their return; he did not wish for any intruders upon him yet awhile. He sat down at the table again, and opened the window as though he needed air; the cold wind came soughing into the room. He sat down to think of this strange interview—of *her* father and mother, who had been ever opposed to him, confronting him in that house. Confronting him also with the past, which would steal back upon him, though he had pressed it down in his heart, set his seal upon it, and tried to live it down. The mother's words shaped themselves anew into an accusation against him, and he sought to resist them, as a misconception and injustice.

"If you had knowed her nature better, or had been more kind and gentle, she might have been here now—a wife and mother in your house."

Ah! what might he have answered to that sad reproach! If *she* had but known him better, thought less of many angry words which came not from his heart—believed in that love which,

despite all false appearances, had remained with him even at the worst.

He had had no mercy upon her at the last; but then mercy would have implied weakness, and she had not solicited it. But if he had asked her to tell him all, to clear up all mystery and rely upon his love, might she not have proved that she was innocent, even in thought, against him? For an instant it seemed possible; the lights upon his darkened way seemed flickering in the distance, indicating life and hope; but it was for an instant only, and then his heart closed, and his better thoughts sank back a hundred times more deeply.

She had left his home—she had never written a line to him asking for pardon, offering an explanation, or caring for that grief, which at one time he feared would wreck a brain, weak by inheritance. She never cared for him; she never loved him—"GUILTY!" in his eyes and his God's.

He was glad that he had locked the door, and that no one knew how weak he was. What a bitter trouble he had yet to fight against, or what a child, in his grief and pain, he could verily become.

CHAPTER III.

MR. PIKE GETS ANXIOUS.

To feel that a man was proceeding in a wrong direction, and that the power to help that man was denied him, was ever a trouble to Mr. Pike. He had experienced that trouble more than once in life, for he was one who did not wholly mind his own business, and was all the better for his disregard of a rule considered golden—but never with so much intensity and mental excitement as in Neal Galbraith's case.

He had been grieved by Walter Tressider's moral decadence, when Walter was a clerk in his uncle's house, falling into debt, and forming acquaintances the reverse of eligible. He had done his best to arrest Tressider's career; he had taken him home, once or twice with the desire to turn his mind to other pursuits, and he had hoped to have been successful, until the climax was reached, and Tressider confessed his ruin in that house in Crow Street. He had been sorry for a young man who had given proof of some good works; he had been always interested in him, as it was his nature to be ever interested in struggling human kind—but it was not the interest that he had had for Neal.

When we think seriously of Mr. Pike, of his simple-mindedness,

with faith in his own powers, and with old-fashioned ideas about tract distributing, tea-meetings, and chapel folk ; when we remember his unselfishness, and his untiring efforts, not always after the best fashion, to do good, we wonder if we have given a fair impression of him to our readers. Pure-ideal men, with an evenness of character and a monotony of action, are difficult to portray, and still more difficult to arouse an interest in—it is human nature's stormy elements which make their mark in novels.

Mr. Pike was troubled seriously, then, about Neal. Neal Galbraith had become quickly his favourite ; Neal's honesty, his straightforwardness, which went at once to its object, had aroused speedily an interest. He detected the elements of much nobleness of character in Neal ; and in the faults that stood in the way, he only saw subject-matter for experiment. He was as fond of moral experiments as of physical, and he thought of Neal as a subject that would be ever handy to his touch, and come out a perfect model of propriety. In his heart he was a vain man, for he had an overweening confidence in his own powers of turning the sinner from evil, and if perseverance could alone have brought him success, he would have never lost faith in his skill.

Before he had seen Neal, he had been interested in the Galbraiths—he had had more than a suspicion of the foul play that had been practised on them in the time of the first invention ; and had been collecting proofs and storing facts, with the intention of taking up their defence in good time, when Neal entered service with the Tressiders. He was even biding his time, when Mr. Tressider bade time adieu—for Mr. Pike was a patient man. But now he had lost all patience, for he saw no progress in Neal Galbraith. The wife's desertion had altered the husband for the worse ; and it appeared as if all the influence for good which he, Mr. Pike, possessed was futile to turn his friend from his misanthropy.

Mr. Pike called it misanthropy, but he was at a loss for a name to assign to Neal's demeanour. He had believed it grief at first, and heaped Neal's table with tracts concerning consolation for every phase of sorrow ; he had fancied it at times remorse ; latterly he had begun to fear that it might be desperation. He knew that Neal's mind was different from most men's—was more retentive, and of a deeper character. At an early age, Neal had met with the greatest trouble that can befall an honourable man, and Pike saw that no diminution of gloom came with the time that set the past away from him. Fifteen months had more than gone by since the wife's desertion of her home, and Neal remained the same impassive being. He could not speak of that wife ; he shunned all allusion to his wrong, and resented it as an insult ; he evinced but little interest in that success which had made him independent—although he owned that he was grateful for the liberty it gave him—he was not even glad to see Mr. Pike.

"This habit will grow upon him," Mr. Pike said one day, to Addie, to whom he communicated all the details of his interviews with Neal; "he is settling down to everything that is objectionable and I can't help him."

"Poor Neal," said Addie, "I wish that I could be of assistance to him in his trouble. He was quite a brother to me at last."

"Ah! he was," sighed Pike. "I don't think that I should have ever liked a brother as I like him. I don't know why it is—his character don't resemble mine, he objects to chapel people, and used to make fun of them sometimes. I would give a good deal of money to hear him make fun of anything now."

"Why, I think you like him better than me, uncle," said Addie, almost pouting.

"Hush!—not quite. But he's in trouble, and he's going wrong, and I don't see the way to help him. If you would help too, Addie."

"I help?"

"He would not mind your calling with me at his house, just for once to break the ice again."

"I help?" repeated Addie, thoughtfully.

"Why not?"

"Sometimes I fancy that I am an unlucky woman, and mar good intentions by my interference," said Addie, in reply; "and I could not be of help to Neal. I see the shadow of his wife resenting any step on my part. She was a poor, wild girl, ready to think harm of me."

"And to do much grievous harm to others," said Mr. Pike, sternly; "we need not think of her or care for her."

He was a hard man, too, in one respect. For a great sin, he was not inclined to offer pardon. He turned from the sinner, unable to comprehend the nature of a temptation which could abase a soul—for a man or woman wilfully setting aside God's laws, he saw no excuse, and would not hear of any. His was a life strangely pure as it were, and he judged too much by his own standard to be wholly faultless.

Addie was thinking of the inutility of her services, and of the folly perhaps of her uncle's suggestion, when a servant entered to announce a visitor.

"I didn't hear a knock," said Mr. Pike.

"It was the area-bell as rung, Sir. A woman as has called, Sir."

"Not—not a young woman?"

Mr. Pike's fears immediately suggested the wife—Neal's wife—coming back to ask their mediation. He was ever full of one subject.

"No, an old woman, Sir—Mrs. Higgs by name."

"Show her up—something's the matter. My dear," he said to

Addie, tugging at his stock for breath, "some—some—something has happened to that boy!"

Mrs. Higgs entered with her usual briskness, but her manner did not satisfy Mr. Pike.

"Anything happened?—what is it? Anything new?"

"No, Sir—nothing new—I wish there had been."

The old lady took off her bonnet for air, without waiting for an invitation, and fanned herself with it. She too had aged marvellously with the family trouble, although the man and woman looking at her were not the people to observe that. Mr. Pike had seen her several times, and Addie more than once had heard Neal speak of the faithful servant and good friend, but neither was in a position to note the change in her. She was only a minor character in the great plot which wrecked Neal's peace, but she felt as much as any of them, though she complained not.

"It's—it's very kind of you to give us a look in," said Mr. Pike; "Addie, dear, Mrs. Higgs will take a glass of wine."

"No, I won't!" said Mrs. Higgs; "I'm in a hurry, and I haven't time for it. I asked for an hour to go shopping; and I thought I'd run over here and try and find you out, and have a bit of talk with you," turning to Pike, "*his* friend."

"Yes, his friend, surely."

"Don't you think that that boy's altering very much? Oh! I see it every day myself, Sir, and it worries me."

"I don't see any alteration in him—I wish I did!"

"Mr. Pike, you don't know all. I know you do your best to alter him, and that he'll listen to you and not to me—an ignorant old woman enough—and I thought I'd come and tell you all!"

"Go on, please," said Mr. Pike, becoming excited as well as interested.

"He's going wrong—I know he is!" said Mrs. Higgs, pausing a moment to wring her hands spasmodically; "that clever boy, who might have been so happy, if he'd married well, Sir. Or," in a husky whisper, "he's going mad, like his poor father did!"

"Great Heavens!—I hope not!" fervently ejaculated Mr. Pike.

"He can't shake it off—the Galbraiths allers had minds that wouldn't shake off things, somehow. I mind 'em speaking about a grandfather, who——"

"There, there—never mind the grandfather—go on."

"He sits and thinks awfully, Neal does," continued Mrs. Higgs; "he don't care to speak—he leaves even his father to me now. *That* you know?"

"Yes, I know that."

"But you don't know that his restless fit comes on when we're away from him—that he leaves the house in the night, and goes God knows where—that there are days, and days now, when he don't come into us."

"Good gracious!"

"And when he does come back, he's worse! He keeps away from us more; and in time he'll kill his father now, for even *he* frets."

"I'll talk to Neal. I'll come to-morrow."

"Oh! you mustn't talk to him, or he'll guess that I've told you, and turn me away. He's not a man to be very 'siderate now, I'm sure."

"Well, well, you may rely upon me not abusing your confidence. I'll do my best, but"—with a sigh, that confessed his want of power—"my best is very little."

Mr. Pike went the next evening to Streatham, but found no opportunity of speaking seriously to Neal. Neal guessed that that opportunity was wanted, and evaded all communion with his friend. He brought his father into the foreground, and rendered that old gentleman voluble concerning his plans—which had become very misty lately—and when Mr. Pike rose to depart, he did not make the usual offer of accompanying him part of his way home.

"You are not going out to-night, Neal?" said Pike, wistfully.

"Not to-night."

"Well, I shall see you soon. I have been thinking of bringing Addie here one evening next week."

"If there is anything here to amuse her, do. I am afraid that she will find it very dull at Streatham."

"Then you'll not venture out to-night, Neal?"

"No, thank you—if you will excuse me."

They shook hands and parted. Neal would not even trust himself to the street door with his friend that night; and Mrs. Higgs, watching for an opportunity, found it in the hall.

"He's going out to-night, Sir," she said hastily; "I heard him tell his father that he was off early to bed; and I know what that means, now."

"Bless my soul!—what can be the use of all this mystery!"

"He thinks his father is happy knowing nothing—and perhaps he is."

"Have you ever spoken to him?"

"Oh! I daren't—I daren't!"

Mr. Pike could not understand that fear, at least. He would speak to Neal that very night. Addie was not to sit up, and time did not matter to him, if it were spent in a good cause—and Neal was going wrong, he feared.

Mr. Pike wandered to and fro on the other side of the roadway, keeping his gaze directed to the house. He would wait an hour, two hours, on the strength of Mrs. Higgs's suspicions. If he could confront Neal, perhaps Neal, in a burst of grief, remorse, and confidence, would tell him all; and then the means to the moral cure might be ready to hand.

Mr. Pike heard Mrs. Higgs draw the heavy chain across the door, and fasten every bolt—he watched the lights die out in the house fronting him. Surely Neal would not come now—why, there was a clock chiming half-past ten in the distance! He would wait a short while, however—there was only himself to inconvenience by lingering about this dark region, and he might find a cab to take him home presently.

He was wondering if he had really waited long enough, when the street door was cautiously unfastened from within. His heart sank, but he tried to nerve his courage to meet his friend going out to danger. The door was opened and closed, and Neal came forth, a dark figure in his cloak. He went at a rapid pace towards the main road, ignorant of watchers, and Mr. Pike had to run to overtake him. At the corner of the street a cab was waiting for Neal Galbraith.

“Have I kept you long?”

“No, Sir—not very.”

Neal was stepping into the cab, when Mr. Pike touched him on the shoulder.

“Neal, where are you going at this time of the night?”

“Where spies are not needed in the shape of friends,” said Neal, quickly. “What do you want here at this hour?” he asked in a more angry tone.

A little disturbed Neal now, and rendered him ungenerous.

“I wanted to see you again—to know where you were going, and with what motive?”

“My motives are purposeless,” said Neal, “but they must not be intruded upon, nevertheless.”

“Neal, you are going wrong.”

“No, I am going west.”

Mr. Pike did not relish the scornful jest, but he made no comment upon it. It was unkind of Neal, and unlike him.

“May I accompany you?” he asked almost submissively.

“If you wish to see life, and would shake off the rust of life’s inaction—come by all means.”

Mr. Pike stepped into the cab also, and Neal and he were driven rapidly away. Neal was annoyed by Mr. Pike’s intrusion, but he cared not to dwell upon the indignity proffered him. He was more annoyed that Mr. Pike had encountered him at the corner of the street, stealing from the house like a robber. There was no occasion for it; he was his own master, thought Neal; it was a false sense of delicacy that took him from his home thus stealthily, and led to difficulties which a more open conduct would have avoided. He had been ashamed to own that his awful sense of loneliness—his wife’s desertion of him, if they willed to call it so—necessitated a reaction that dashed into the thick of life, and defied temptation to assail him. He did not care to enter into any explanation that might put his

conduct in a better light with his old friend. He had arrived at that pass when the world's opinion on his conduct was not of moment to him. Presently there must follow another reaction that would save him, or he would sink away from Right altogether, with only an honest heart or two to mourn his fall.

Mr. Pike essayed to speak, but Neal checked him.

"Come with me, if you will," he said, "watch my actions, if it please you, but—do not preach. I cannot bear a sermon to-night."

"Oh! Neal, how changed you are!"

"I tried to be a rock and resist all change. See the mistake that I have made!"

"I can't make you out. You are incomprehensible," Mr. Pike wailed forth feebly.

"I am an enigma not worth the trouble of solving, Sir," said Neal, touched by the sorrow in Mr. Pike's voice; "there, let me advise you to part with me here—or let the cab take you home and leave me to walk. You will think worse of me than I deserve, if you go further."

"No, Neal—I will accompany you."

Neal gave up any further attempt to dissuade Pike from his intention.

"As you will."

The cab rattled through the London streets, where the shops were not all closed yet, and across Westminster Bridge. Mr. Pike looked from the window once or twice as the cab made its way down narrow turnings and confused him as to locality.

"Do you come here very often, Neal?" he asked.

But Neal did not answer him, and he repeated not his question.

In a narrow, grimy street, the cab drew up before the entrance of some dancing-rooms—Pike guessed that from the music welling forth into the night.

"Here?" he asked vacantly.

"Here."

Men and women were hanging about the doors, jostling each other on the steps, well-dressed men and women, whose meaningless laughter jarred upon the nerves of the Dissenter. Cabs were rattling towards them, and forming into line, setting down a host of jaded *roués*, who lounged towards the vortex, and a few of whom, with disordered white cravats, had been staying late over dessert, and had wandered hitherwards for fresh excitement; there was a rustle of silk upon the stairs and in the streets, and Vice in holiday garb, and with rouged cheeks, flitted everywhere.

"Neal," gasped Mr. Pike, laying his hand upon our hero's shoulder—alas! our hero—but Neal shook his hand away, and entered, paying his fee, an action imitated by him who played the part of Mentor to so little purpose.

Into a brilliantly lighted room of considerable extent, at the end

of which was a raised orchestra, full of staid-looking musicians in evening dress. The room itself was full of light, life and colour—all was a bewilderment to Pike, and all took time to comprehend. He knew that he was in a sinful haunt, where money was freely spent, and vice was patronised—where people thrived by vice and looked down upon struggling virtue—where there was just a fair semblance of propriety, for the sake of outward show and next year's licence. Pike looked round him, and on all sides of him, for one honest face, and failed to see it in the crowd; there were folly and cupidity amongst the men, and bravado, set desperation, smirking apathy, amongst the women—but there was nothing good, or that had a trace of good, perceptible in that place. And amidst it all, whilst the musicians paused, and the crowd surged to and fro, there prowled a little Jewish man, with his hat on the back of his head, and his hands jingling loose silver in his pockets—a wretched fellow, who fattened in this den, and profited by the viciousness of mankind. Restless as an evil genius, he crawled from the ball-room to the gallery, from the gallery to the refreshment-room, a personification of the devil himself, seeking whom he might devour. He bowed to all liberal patrons, and exchanged a friendly nod with faces that he knew—with Neal's amongst the rest.

"Here he is again!" was whispered more than once concerning Neal—"the dumb man of Miller Street—the man with something on his mind!"

Neal paid a further fee, and went into the gallery that extended along three sides of the room, Pike still following him. When he was seated, and the music had pealed forth again, when the mad dance had begun below, and conversation fast and furious as the dance was proceeding on all sides of him, Pike found breath to speak.

"Oh! Neal—I did not think so bad of you as this!"

"Think what you please."

"What pleasure can *you* take amongst such men—and, my God, such women as these? You whom I have always thought a temperate-living man."

"I watch life here."

"Life verging on moral death—where is the lesson worth learning in a place like this?"

"There are valuable lessons to be learned everywhere, if one has the courage to pursue them. I do not shrink."

"Mad!—mad!" moaned Mr. Pike.

Neal started. 'There were times when he believed that he was going mad himself, so difficult in his own mind even was it to reconcile his actions with common sense. Was he like his father, after all—was he too weak to bear the shock that had desolated home, and blasted every bud of promise?

"Neal, you must come home. You must quit this place; I can't bear to leave you here—and I can't stop."

"Pray do not expose yourself to any inconvenience on my account," said Neal coolly, "I am more used to this life than you are."

"Do you make your wife's sin the poor excuse for facing such a life and becoming lost in it?"

"Hush!—don't speak of my wife here! She may hear you!"

"She!—is she here, then?" and Pike cast a startled glance over his shoulder.

"She is coming!"

"I hope not."

"Her life must end in places like this and I am waiting for the end."

"Come home, for your soul's sake."

"Not yet, Mr. Pike."

"Then you and I must part."

"Good-evening," said Neal.

"We must part for ever, Neal, if this is the road you are bent on pursuing, and you will not listen to my counsel. I—I did think," he added, with a faltering voice, "that I had a little influence over you until to-night, and that you listened to me now and then, and did not deliberately seek evil company, after this fashion. But you defy me; you take pleasure, and only pleasure, in these places, and you are not fit for me or my purer life. From to-night you must choose between your best friend—I think your best, Neal—and the evil thoughts which rebel against God's will. Which is it to be?"

"I am not called upon to make a choice, and I decline an answer."

"Then I must wish you good-bye," said Pike, with evident excitement; "I shall never see you again. I give you up as incurable!"

Neal shrugged his shoulders.

"If you will not think of yourself, or your future—think of your old father, whose disgrace will be yours, and whose pride is only in you, Neal. Will you do this?"

"Not now."

"Then, good-bye, Neal. I am sorry—very, very sorry—that you value this society before my love for you. God help you, for I can't!"

Mr. Pike started from the seat, and pushed his way towards the staircase. He could bear no more—he must give Neal up from that night. The place was becoming more crowded every instant—people from theatres and supper-rooms were hastening here and jostling one another on the stairs—the devil jingled more merrily the silver in his pockets, even the great chandeliers seemed to sparkle more brightly with the influx of business, and the musicians to play heavenly music to the earthlings with a greater spirit. Pike

gave one heavy sob as he tore himself into the street, and a woman burst into a hideous laugh as he hustled past her.

"Drunk, Jenny, as a lord!" she cried to her companion.

She understood the symptoms; she had been often "crying drunk" herself—only drunken people betrayed emotion in that gaudy hell.

Mr. Pike ran along the street, paying no heed to proffered cabs. He was very heart-sick, very heart-broken. It had been a struggle to resign Neal, to leave him there—but Neal had confessed his acquaintance with, and his liking for, that society, and Pike felt that all was over between them after that avowal.

He was thinking so, when an arm was thrust through his, and he was walked on at a pace more rapid than he had hitherto adopted.

"There—I am with you! After all, Pike, I can't afford to lose *you*!"

"God bless you, Neal!—God bless you!" said Mr. Pike, struggling to keep the tears from his eyes. "I am so glad!"

"I am not worthy of this friendship," said Neal, "but I will try and respect it, if you'll let me. You have warned me, and I see my danger—I will make one effort to be good. But oh! Pike, if you could only understand how I loved that woman—and what a void in life she has left me."

"Courage! Time!" said Pike.

"When I was most harsh, I thought that it was for her good—I had a hope even then of seeing her a good wife, loving and trusting me. It has been a disappointment too hard to bear, and I gave way. But I *will* be stronger—there, I promise you."

"Thank you. You must come and see me more often now. You will not seek"—with a shudder—"that life again?"

"I give it up."

"And you will come?"

"Well—if you wish it. But I shall make you very miserable by my grave looks—you and Miss Merton."

"And you will go home now—stronger, braver, better?"

"I will try to be all three—we must not let the old father go down to his grave with regret for me. You touched the right chords then, Pike—how they have been rusting."

They shook hands and parted. Pike returned home in triumph to Hackney Road. To his surprise, Addie was sitting up for him.

"There, you must not scold me, uncle. But I was afraid that something had happened and I could not rest."

"Something has happened, Addie," said Mr. Pike. "Neal has stepped back to his old self, from the brink of the gulf, where a good man might have been lost. He has sought comfort from the world, instead of from its Maker; but he turns away at last. I am so happy to-night!—so very happy, Addie."

Mr. Pike dropped into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. At home, he could give way and be less manlike—and the struggle had been a hard one with him.

"I don't know," he said, suddenly recovering, "why I should like that youth so much—but I feel in some way or other responsible for his better life. If he had only married you, instead of Miss Webber, as I hoped and prayed he would."

"Oh! you did not hope that, uncle!" cried Addie.

"And—and he must not be tied all his life to an infamous woman now. Whilst she bears his name, he shares in her disgrace, and that has preyed upon him long enough."

Mr. Pike was off his guard that night, and betrayed too much. Addie's hand stole to her bosom as her cheeks paled suddenly.

"You must not think of Neal and me loving one another," she said quickly; "it can never be! I—I have never thought of him."

"Not of another—you too, Addie?"

Addie bowed her head, as he had done a moment since, and did not answer.

"Oh! Addie, is this true?"

"I have had no secrets from you until now; but I could not find the courage to tell you, and I hoped that you would guess it."

"How could I guess that you—that *you* would fall in love! Is it young Hedger, who went abroad the other day?"

"No."

"Will you tell me his name?"

"You will never forgive me!" she murmured; "it was so wrong to love him, and he never had one single thought of me. I tried not."

"And this man's name?"

"Tressider."

Mr. Pike gasped with affright. Was it possible?—that man, that wicked man, of all upon God's earth.

"Addie!—Addie!—how was this?"

"He was so friendless in the world, and my heart sorrowed for him. He was an orphan like myself; and oh! I saw much goodness in him, that only needed the right word, the right way, to flower forth. I tried not to think of him, and of his poor life of pleasure and frivolity; but I could not shut my heart against him; and I knew that I loved him when he went wholly wrong."

"But now, Addie, you must not tell me that there remains one spark of affection for that villain? You, whose whole life I have studied so intently?"

"The spark has vanished—I have a woman's pride. But——"

"But," repeated Mr. Pike.

"But you must not plan for Neal and me a life that cannot be. That would be the beginning of another error."

"I see!—I am silent!" murmured Mr. Pike; "but how strange it all is!—how very strange."

The strangeness of it kept him sleepless throughout that early morning—the inconsistency of women's fancies—even good women like this sober little Dissenter, whose history he thought he knew by heart till then. To think that that reckless, handsome spendthrift—a play-actor and a rake—should have ever won upon his innocent niece, whose staidness was his model and his pride! Yes, it was very strange; and the future, looking at it steadily, did not seem to brighten very much for the only two he loved in all the world.

CHAPTER IV.

NEAL STARTS ON A JOURNEY.

NEAL GALBRAITH changed for the better. If he wore no brighter look, still there was less utter despondency; and he saw the duties lying before him in a different light. He chafed not at the inevitable, as though he had been the only sufferer undergoing the fiery ordeal of affliction: he bore his sorrow better, and he felt within himself that the worst was over.

If in his heart Neal still treasured his wrongs, he gave no voice to them, and he did not seek to dissipate them in the vortex from which Pike had rescued him. He knew no mercy—he would never know mercy, perhaps—on the sin which had cut him adrift from home ties; but he did not brood upon his loss, and he no longer considered himself justified in perilling his own soul, out of very despair. He had been a thoughtful man—and he stepped back once more from his self-isolation to think of others, and to study others. He did not believe in any happiness falling to his share—not even in the long days ahead of him, when time should heal his wounds and bring him hopes once more; but he believed that he should have the power to do his duty in life, and wrong no man by his rashness.

He became again the watchful and considerate son to Mr. Galbraith, casting a new light on the latter days. He had the art of hiding away his one great loss almost, and he profited by the study of it, and made his father happier. He became the friend of Mr. Pike in earnest; for at last he knew what anxiety he had caused him.

He went with his father to Hackney Road; and if the meetings there were not merry ones, still they brought some comfort unto all, for they presaged the dawn of times less dark. Neal would even stray into Mr. Pike's warehouse—where business was always brisk,

and contrasted so strangely with the old days at Shad Thames—and feel, rather than feign, an interest in the business-life around him.

"You will settle down here after all, Neal," Mr. Pike would say, cheerfully. "You'll get on more bravely at your desk, with the old task-work to your hand."

"Don't press me yet awhile to work—I shrink away from labour, as beyond my strength," said Neal. "I am like a man recovering from an illness, that has left him very weak and helpless."

"But who will grow stronger every day now."

"Who will try, at least."

They were evenings of calm reunion after a while—when the summer had come, Neal used to look forward to them. Once a week at Pike's house—once a week Pike and his niece at Streatham—and the remaining days to think of the meetings that had been, and that were yet in store for him. He must be weak in mind to be solaced by so little, he thought ruefully sometimes; he wondered whether he should ever be really strong again, and able to take his place in the world. He began to appreciate the value of Addie Merton's society now that they were thrown together—to see how good she was, and what skill she had in diverting from their course the dark thoughts which now and then beset him in society.

Addie Merton had confessed to her uncle her inability to love Neal Galbraith, and now that there was no probability of being misunderstood, she set to work at the task of lightening Neal's sorrows. She had a ready tact, born of long practice, that assisted her; she was naturally of a cheerful temperament, and there was a practical method in her style that gave a dead blow to "the horrors." She was matter-of-fact without being dull, and pious without being severe. One could wonder, like Pike, why she had ever fallen in love with Walter Tressider, if one did not know that to each life there falls some fragment of romance, creating heroes and heroines out of nothing. Addie was not a perfect woman, and was even now only eighteen years of age—and life before that age creates some brilliant fictions, even in the minds of staid Dissent, that is taught to disregard them.

She could be a sister to Neal without being misunderstood, she thought; Neal was not likely to misinterpret her actions, and she was sure that her uncle would not. She was sorry for Neal's mistake in life, and she strove very hard, when she had recovered from the shock of his altered looks, to render the world less like a desert to him.

Meanwhile Mr. David Pike said nothing, but let her strive, and, like most men who are reticent, he thought the more. He thought of a new story in good time for all Addie's past avowals. Addie was a sensible girl, who would shake off her one fancy for an object that never deserved her, and see in Neal a better choice, a higher standard for a hero. He believed that there would come a day

when Neal would soften too, and Pike was a man who had the courage to wait patiently. Meanwhile Neal was a married man, and he must watch carefully the different changes of his nature. Whilst Addie and Neal were simply acquaintances—something less than brother and sister—good would evolve from their companionship; but when he saw “a difference”—and he was watching keenly for it—he must set his interdict upon their meeting, until Neal had taken steps to procure that divorce, which was in his case so readily obtainable.

It is a question whether Mr. Pike was not at fault here, for all his carefulness—for all the prosaic natures of those whom he made his study. But Mr. Pike was a man who trusted implicitly in Neal, and Neal was not likely to abuse his confidence. Neither was Neal likely to fall in love suddenly and hastily with his friend's niece; he had had enough of love to last a life-time; he had begun and ended early. There were times when David Pike ventured to suggest that Neal should think of freeing his name from the woman who had disgraced it; and though Neal turned his stern self to the light at the hint, he did not wholly forbid an intrusion on the subject.

“It matters not,” said Neal; “I have no interest to serve, and I save myself the pain of publicity. I shall never marry again.”

“Never's a long day, Neal,” Mr. Pike would reply, with a sinking heart.

“You may trust me with that determination — I shall never regret that I have made it.”

Mr. Pike felt no fear of Neal loving prematurely his niece after that—so the waters were still, if deep, and beyond there seemed no signs of their surface being disturbed.

It was summer-time at last—the middle of summer—bright July weather, when London is in its season, and the green lands at their brightest, that a country newspaper found its way to Neal. The newspaper, a Nottingham journal, had been addressed to Fife Street—in a woman's handwriting, that he failed to recognise—and had travelled about town, becoming dogs-eared and dirty in its progress, scored by many postmasters, and at last reaching him at Streatham.

Neal read the paper through, and found no clue to the motive that had sent it to him. It perplexed him—it was, more or less, a sign from the days which he was trying to outlive. It might have been a jest—ill-timed and foolish—of some one who had had a faint recollection of his name and place of abode—and yet he doubted it. Looking at it, he could believe that something was intended by that paper, the mystery of which he had not solved yet. He knew nothing of Nottingham; he had never seen the place, or remembered to have spoken of it, or heard others speak; in the paper printed in that town, he could not see one line to interest him. There were local news of no importance; there were races in the course of the

week; there were accounts of prices at Nottingham market, and of fights in Nottingham town; there was a run upon Nottingham lace, and more hands wanted—a thousand hands, he saw by one advertisement; there was a theatre at Nottingham, and he looked carefully for the name of Raymond in the advertised list of “stars,” and found it not; there had been a fire at Nottingham, and a man burned to death; there were ten advertisements at least from quacks, who had exhausted London credulity, and were striving hard for country connections; there were bullocks and sheep for sale, and doleful prophecies of the coming harvest; but there was nothing from the florid heading to the printer’s name that had its interest for Neal.

Still he took the paper up twenty times that day, as though he would tire the mystery out of it, casting it at last aside, in despair of a clue.

“What is it all about, Neal?”

“Local news, of no importance to us.”

The old gentleman stooped, picked up the paper, and glanced down the first column.

“Why!—what’s this?”

“Is it possible that you have found the reason for this paper being sent to me?”

“I don’t know, Neal—it is not very likely—but don’t you remember that that man—Joe, they called him—who came to Fife Street once, belonged to a travelling circus?”

“I remember nothing of the kind. It is possible—well?”

“Here’s an advertisement of Toppin’s Circus—that was the name, I fancy—it will be at Nottingham in the race-week.”

Neal took the paper from his father’s hands, and read and re-read this advertisement. He had passed it twenty times, noticing the heading, and the time announced for a grand entry into Nottingham, without attributing thereto any connection between it and him. - He could not believe now that it was for that reason the paper had been sent him—or that his father’s memory was strong enough for minor facts like these. But Joe and his wife, he remembered, had been some time at Fife Street before his return home one night; his father had been annoyed and startled by their presence there, by the history of their antecedents, and the recapitulation of their pursuits; he had sat there a listener, disgusted with his daughter-in-law’s relations, and he had not missed a word. Neal let the paper drop from his hands, to think more seriously of this. A Nottingham paper forwarded to Fife Street by some one who knew not of his change of life; a circus to be erected at Nottingham in the race-week; Joe Webber connected with a circus; a remembrance of Mrs. Webber, thinking it probable that her daughter Carry was with Joe, and not with Tressider—so the fragments of a story pieced themselves together, and disturbed the thinker.

"When are the races?" Neal asked of his father, who had taken up the paper again.

"The 20th of July."

"That is to-morrow—Wednesday."

"But—but you don't think——"

"Patience—I have not had time to think, yet awhile."

Neal began to think in earnest after that assertion; he went fathoms deep into thought, which took him away from passing things and present life; the old look which had grown fainter in the latter days settled on his face again, furrowing and darkening. In the afternoon he went for a long walk, coming back still thoughtful, to lock himself in his study, and decline Mrs. Higgs's offers of refreshment. He had dined; he had had his tea; his head ached, and when he had done writing he would go to his room that night.

"What a madman I was to tell him about the circus!" whimpered Mr. Galbraith; "I knew that I had never got quite sane!"

"He'll wake up brisk again," said the sanguine Mrs. Higgs.

"I have been a trouble to him all his life," said the father; "if I had stopped at home that day, Carry and he might have made it up—and now I'm putting all kinds of foolish thoughts into his head. I'm a miserable old muddler, Mrs. Higgs, and the sooner I'm comfortably buried the better for everybody."

"There, hold your tongue, Sir, do!" reprimanded Mrs. Higgs.

"It's the creeps you give me by your fretfulness."

"I feel," he added, in a whisper, "just as if something was going to happen. I'm sure it is."

"Oh! good lor, let's get a light. What a man you are."

Mrs. Higgs prepared to close the shutters on the deepening twilight, and to light the gas in the chandelier above their heads. It was not pleasant sitting in the dark, listening to the forebodings of a weak old man. It made her superstitious against her will. She was glad to get to bed early, and to see Mr. Galbraith to his room. In the morning Neal would be more like himself, and the fears of something happening would be dissipated.

Early on that morning, when the house was light with a new day, and the clocks in the house were striking five, Neal turned the handle of his father's door, and entered the room softly.

"Oh! is that you, boy?" said Mr. Galbraith, quickly; "I'm not asleep."

"You wake too early, father," he said; "however, it is all the better this morning, for I can bid you good-bye now."

"Go—od—bye?"

Mr. Galbraith sat quickly up in bed, with his night-cap awry, and his hands clutching his knees.

"Why—what—what—what do you mean by "Good-bye?"

"Good-bye till to-morrow. That's not a very long farewell, is it, or one to grow sentimental concerning?"

"Where are you going?"

"To Nottingham Races. Just for a little change and a little pleasure. Do you blame me?"

"Not if it is for the change only; but oh! Neal—it isn't."

Neal sat down at the side of his father's bed and looked at his watch.

"I have scarcely a minute to spare, but you must understand that there is nothing to be alarmed at in this journey. That man Webber, who brought his wife to Fife Street, nineteen months ago, may know what has become of *her*!"

"What does it matter now?"

"I am interested in her fate—that's all."

"If you should see her?—if she should be with those people?"

"It could make no difference to me. I am ever apart from her."

"Then why go?"

"I am curious. I am haunted by a voice that urges me to action. I must find Joseph Webber if I can."

"I will not try to persuade you to stay," said Mr. Galbraith; "it's best, perhaps—I don't know. I can't think, just at present. You'll take care of yourself, and don't jump out of the train before it stops; and mind the horses on the course; and—and *don't* be later than to-morrow—there's a dear boy."

Neal left with these injunctions in his ears. He went along the landing to Mrs. Higgs's door, at which he knocked.

"Who's there?"

"I, Neal. I am going to Nottingham—see after my father till I return."

"Not——"

Neal heard no more. He had hastened down stairs, and from the house; he was walking rapidly down Brixton Hill a few minutes afterwards. He had a long way to walk before a conveyance could be procured to take him to King's Cross; but the train did not leave till six o'clock—a special train for the race day—and he should reach Kennington in little more than half an hour. He walked rapidly—the current of his thoughts was rapid too, and seemed to help him onwards. Why was he going?—was it only curiosity?—was there any hope, or any fear, that urged him on his way?—hope that she was not wholly bad, that she had repented, and was trying to live honestly with her brother?—that she had never gone with Tressider?—fear that she was dying, or dead; that there was something blacker still against her, and it would meet him full front amidst the crowd of pleasure-seekers? There was a cab at Kennington that took him to the railway station, where there were life and bustle enough that early morning. All

the black-legs, all the betting-men, all the three-card shufflers, all the heterogeneous mass of nondescripts who live by racing, all the thieves that London could afford for an entertainment so many miles distant, were assembled at King's Cross. It was a *bonâ fide* sporting train, for the accommodation of those who wished to reach Nottingham before the race, and Neal saw few people near him without rapacious faces, and eager, hungry eyes.

He was in the train, which rattled on to Nottingham at last. He could almost imagine that he was in a dream still, prosecuting on of those vague, purposeless journeys more common to dream-land than to life. The laughter in his ears; the sudden altercations that arose about old bets, new horses, jockeys, everything appertaining to the turf, from the betting-men who filled the carriage; the oily way in which the oaths flowed forth, and the strength of the adjectives which preceded every personality, were scarcely reconcilable with any life that Neal had known.

It was a long journey, and insufferably wearisome. The sporting men eyed Neal with suspicion; and when he betrayed no sign of satisfaction at the first coarse anecdote indulged in, that suspicion verged into positive dislike. Neal closed his eyes and feigned to sleep, to avoid being dragged into the general conversation, and when a few remarks had been made upon his stolidity, general appearance, and want of sociability, there was a run upon oaths and horses again that lasted all the way to Peterborough.

Neal escaped at Peterborough into another compartment, but he passed from bad to worse and lived to repent the transfer. Two more betting-men and three rakish individuals with white hats, who looked like betting-men, were Neal's companions for the remainder of the journey—and white-hatted fraternity produced cards immediately the train had started, and suggested a quiet game at whist, for stakes of a merely nominal character. Neal was in no mood for whist, and declined to take a hand, declined to be interested in the cards, which were offered for his inspection, as a capital sample of a new pattern introduced from Paris; declined to watch the progress of a little game with two diamonds and the king of spades; and was dead to all inducements to lay a single penny upon the whereabouts of his majesty, though he was on the knee of the gentleman opposite, who had kindly bent the corner of the card so that Neal should make quite sure of winning.

Neal was looked upon once more with suspicion, was once more freely criticised directly he closed his eyes. When would it be Nottingham, and he clear of this den of thieves? Had it not been folly to come here at all, on the mere supposition of a newspaper advertisement affecting him in a remote degree? Would it be a satisfaction to him to know that his wife had not eloped with Tresider, or had lived all these long months with her disreputable brother? In either case what could result from this long journey?

—what could he learn that would add one moment's peace to the future, wherein he had promised himself to be more humble in his suffering?

At Nottingham at last, and harassed by a dozen fly-drivers, Nottingham fly drivers, with sunken eyes and high cheek bones, and altogether pugilistic in appearance.

"Where's Toppin's Circus?"

"Whose?"

Neal repeated the question, and the man asked "Whose?" again, with a fierceness of aspect as though scenting a joke against his self-respect. Neal produced the newspaper which he had brought with him from London, and pointed to the advertisement. The man leaned his hands on Neal's shoulder whilst he looked at the paper—a friend, interested therein, came and leaned on the flyman's shoulder—a third, facetiously inclined, pushed against all three, and stopped the progress of a railway porter with a barrow. Hereupon an altercation ensued in the Nottingham dialect, and allusions to punching heads were freely bandied.

"Drive to the race-course," said Neal, leaping into a fly, and resolving to search for the circus on his own account; and a few minutes afterwards he was being bumped and jolted through the Nottingham streets, amongst carts, and omnibuses, and flies, with two or three ragged beings brandishing cards of the races through the open windows.

A busy town, with signs of a general holiday at every corner, the Nottingham roughs gathering in force, and the lace-makers in their Sunday's best streaming towards the one centre of attraction, laughing and romping by the way.

Set down at the gates beyond the town leading to the race-course, and passing through them towards higher ground, where the canvas roofs of booths were seen, Neal began his strange quest. The sandy soil on which the course was situated, the sandy hills sloping down towards the course, the sandy paths meandering right and left and straight ahead, gave a desert aspect to the place, and threatened ophthalmia when the crowd thickened, and the wind came fresher from the hills beyond. The dust was rising from the carriage-road, and the tents on the higher ground loomed through a sandy fog, that would be denser presently.

Neal made his way towards the booths—long rows of drinking booths—long rows of fighting booths, with fancy portraits of men in sparring attitudes outside the doors—a booth for dancing after race hours—and then more sparring booths—and more booths devoted to illimitable drinking. The high-cheeked, keen-eyed sons of Nottingham were thick here—they were prepared for any amount of quarrelling, and were already indulging in any amount of swearing—the oaths were thicker than the dust, which was fast settling on coats and hats, hair and whiskers, rendering mankind one gritty pattern.

Neal found the circus at last, lying a little apart from the straggling rows of fighting booths, a forest of scaffolding at present, with a dozen men hard at work setting up the canvas, nailing up flaming pictures of wild horses, highly-educated horses, male riders in fleshings, and women in short skirts; the whole surrounded by a crowd of holiday folk, interested in the proceedings, and swearing fluently at everything.

Neal forced his way to the front, not without opposition and a hundred oaths hurled at him for his haste, and touched the arm of a man superintending the finishing process—a burly man, with a thick black moustache, on which the dust had settled.

"This is Toppin's Circus, I presume?"

"Yes, Sir," replied the gentleman addressed, after a critical survey of Neal's general appearance.

"Advertised in the Nottingham papers to appear here during the race week?"

"Exactly so."

"I have come from London in search of it."

"All the way from London to see us!" exclaimed the gentleman addressed; "to see the circus—really."

"Not for the entertainment's sake—but to find one of your company."

"Oh! he's gone."

This was a little premature, and Toppin—for it was Toppin himself upon whom Neal Galbraith had intruded—thought so himself the moment afterwards. But Toppin had scented danger to some improvident money borrowing member of his community, and this was a gala-day, on which no one could be spared.

"At least, I dare say he has," Toppin corrected; "we change and change about our company, and there's nothing like variety. Who's the man you want?"

"A man whom I will pay well for any information that he can give me concerning—his sister; a man named Joseph Webber."

"Oh! he's in——"

"He's in Nottingham, and I must see him for a minute or two. If I rob you of his services for a short while, you must tell me what they're worth."

"Hum—well, a man's worth half a guinea to me now—for we're behind time, and shall ring in at half-past twelve."

Neal tendered the money, which Mr. Toppin took with an airy blessing on the donor.

"You'll not keep him long I hope, Sir—we don't call him Webber in the troop. Hi! Jack—see if you can find Signor Delavanti in any of the caravans, and tell him that I want him."

CHAPTER V

WAITING.

JOSEPH WEBBER, *alias* Signor Delavanti, was some time making his appearance. Neal began to grow suspicious of the delay; a circus was built in, and fit for use whilst he waited—"Toppin's Far-famed Circus!" as announced by the painted canvas flapping overhead in the wind, which was blowing fresher with every hour.

When Neal was thinking of a search for Mr. Toppin again, with the idea of seeking further information, Joe suddenly appeared at his side.

"I'm told, Sir, that you—why, it's Galbraith."

Joe was fairly surprised; he was not actor enough to feign this complete bewilderment. He backed some paces, keeping his hands in his pockets, and his shoulders raised above his ears, after that slouching style peculiar to Joe.

"Yes. Did you not expect me?"

"Who—you?"

"Did you not send me a newspaper, containing an advertisement of this circus's arrival in Nottingham?"

"Upon my soul, I didn't."

Joe was embarrassed—but for once, at least, it was evident that he was truthful. He stood shuffling up the sand at his feet, deliberating as to the wisest course to pursue; there was something puzzling to Joe in Neal Galbraith's propinquity.

"I have come a long journey to ask you a few questions."

"I'm not bound to answer them, without I like," said Joe, suddenly assuming a dogged demeanour.

"Yes, you are."

"I don't see who's to make me!" replied Joe, still defiantly; "least of all, I don't fancy that it's likely to be *you*!"

"I'll pay you for your trouble."

"Curse your pay, Sir! I can earn my bread without your charity!" said Joe. "You're no friend of mine now! I could have cut your throat twelve months ago, and swung for it."

The worst side of Joe's character—or the best, which was it?—seemed apparent at this juncture. Neal regarded him steadily—was even prepared to resist that sudden attack, which the small, fierce eyes threatened.

"You and I have no cause to be friends! You needn't come sponging here for information. You've had your way, and got rid of your wife without a penny to pay for it! Why, she was too good for you."

"What has become of her?" asked Neal.

"What do you want to know for?" rejoined Joe.

"Is she with you?"

"Will you take her back if she is?"

"Back!" cried Neal—"take back a woman who left my house of her own free will nineteen months ago! Do you think that I'm a madman?"

"What do you want here, may I ask again?" said Joe.

"I would know that woman's fate; if she is here with you, and struggling for a better life, ask what you will of me for her support."

Joe relapsed into a thoughtful mood again; his hands seemed to thrust themselves deeper into his trousers pockets, and his feet to kick up, slowly and deliberately, a pile of sand over Neal's boots and his own. He was thinking still, when a man came rushing from the circus towards him.

"What! aint yer dressed yet!—who's going to wait for you, do you think?—who's going on after Toppin's daughter?—who's allers going to be put fust afore the people come in? Toppin's in a fine rage, I can tell you—and there's the band outside already."

Sure enough the brass band of Toppin's establishment burst forth at this juncture, and a rush of the mob in the vicinity was made in its direction. Here was something to see before the race-bell rang.

"If you want anything more to say to me," said Joe—"if you've got anything to propose, or want to hear anything, you'd better come to that caravan at ten o'clock to-night—that green bodied affair yonder, where the dog's chained to the hind wheels."

"I ask you now——"

"I've my living to get, Mr. Galbraith," said Joe, with sullen dignity, "and Toppin don't think twice about giving a man the sack. You can come or stop away, just as it pleases you—I shall be there at ten."

"I will come."

Whether Joe Webber heard him or not, was not apparent. Joe had walked away rapidly towards the caravan that he had pointed out—time was against him, and he had fleshings and spangles to put on—and Neal watched him run up the caravan steps, open the door, and enter, leaving the dog whining after him, heart-broken for lack of patronage.

Neal turned away to think of the interview that he had had with this man, and to wonder for awhile at the new demeanour of Joe Webber. Neal smiled grimly at the idea of Joe asserting any dignity, at that mountebank judging the story in a different manner, and seeing faults in *him*! He had been bitterly deceived—cruelly disgraced, thought Neal, as he wandered down the sand-banks listlessly, and this man's defence of his sister—subdued though it had been—was a burlesque of sentiment.

"You've got rid of your wife without a penny to pay for it!" It was a sharp taunt, but what did it matter, after all? What was the woman to him now, or what claim had she upon him after her flight? There was no explanation of her conduct that would be accepted as a fair defence by the world, or by himself. There might be something to pity; but there was not anything in her story that his pride could forgive, he felt assured. Even that story he did not care to hear, he thought—if she were with her brother, or her brother could prove to him that she was attempting to live honestly, why, he was prepared to assist her with his money; but to see her, or to speak to her again, never, so help his God!

He uttered that oath—fearful and impotent—in the broad day; he was in no mood for forgiveness; curiosity after all, a sense of wrong that nothing could set right, a whim that he had not the power to resist, had brought him to Nottingham—nothing of the old fond love which had led the boy into marriage. *That* had been the fault of a life, and it could never be atoned for by the bitter sorrow, to which years would not bring assuagement. In the last course of action, which had ended in Carry's flight from home, he might not have acted wisely—he guessed how foolishly, at times—but in her retaliation for his error, what an awful, soul-destroying vengeance! No, there was no pardon for it—he had not come to offer pardon!

Neal wandered about all day on the race-grounds. How the day was spent he never knew, although it seemed as if the holiday would never end, and there would be racing till the judgment. It was all a something more distant from reality than even dream-land now; he wandered to and fro, scarcely realising the scene, and yet beset by one thought that he might be going mad at last, and this was the first stage. He tried more than once to shake the thoughts away, and mix with the surging, swaying crowd about him bent upon enjoyment; but the dead apathy overtook him before the resolution was five minutes old, and he was groping on his way again, and praying that the night would come. The people rushed against him now and then, and swore at him for being in the way; he was conscious of being hemmed in by a crowd of faces interested in some charlatan, then of standing by the rails, packed in with more blaspheming men, and brazen-faced women, who shrieked with laughter at the blasphemy; then of some horses dashing past, a bell ringing, and a roar of voices shouting out the winner. He found himself paying money at the grand stand, with an instinctive desire to escape the crowd and dust; then he was toiling up a staircase as though he were an old man, and taking a seat at the back of a large room, where people were devouring dinners of lukewarm salmon, and shouting out for cucumber. He sat there till the waiters fell over his feet, and politely requested him to move a little further; he felt at last that he was in the way of business,

and strolled listlessly through a side-door, to be ushered out again, with an intimation, not too polite, that that was the Earl of Romford's party, and his company was not required there. He found himself on the balcony, looking over the betting ring, with a man in a white hat endeavouring to engage him in conversation; he broke away from him, and was warned from a second intrusion on a side balcony by a label, informing the world that the Marquis of Battersea had his particular party in that corner, and required no interference from the *canaille*, and though the Marquis of Battersea's party did not appear too select—especially amongst its feminine constituents—Neal respected the warning, and wandered into ground less holy. He was at a bar struggling for brandy after that; he had turned suddenly faint, and was beset with a fear of dropping senseless there, with no one to claim him; and the brandy once secured, he seemed to recover from his stupor for awhile.

He found himself ascending more stairs, and resting on a dusty zinc-covered roof, which had not been much patronised that day, owing to the keenness of the easterly wind, that rendered too much air unpleasant. He rested and tried to collect his thoughts—to make quite sure of the object that had brought him to Nottingham, and of the end of that journey coming with the night. When he had mastered these thoughts—or believed that he had mastered them—when he was shuddering with cold, and grateful for the sun looking westwardly inclined, he went down stairs and out of the grand stand, into the noise and sand-mist. He toiled up the sand-hills towards the booths once more, and watched the drinking and the fighting, pushing his way in and out of crowds, and finally betaking himself to Toppin's Circus, where a brisk business was doing; men, women, and children streaming up the steps, and Toppin rapping at the canvas with his cane, and expatiating on the merits of his entertainment.

Having made certain that the circus was in existence still, the caravan there, the dog still chafing at the wheel, Neal went away again—far away from the course at a rapid pace, into the country, as though he would reach the hills, by which the view was bounded—green hills, that must have made a fair feature in a landscape before the factory shafts had shot up in their midst. Neal wandered away from the dust and turmoil, and returned not until the twilight. The race was over; there were a few people strolling about the course; the stand was empty of all parties—aristocratic and otherwise; there were streams of townfolk making for home, and the dust rose more heavily than ever beneath their receding steps. They were lighting up the drinking and dancing booths; they were burning fatty compositions in huge receivers at the fighting tents; those who remained behind to make a night of it, were the dross of the factory hands—the refuse of the great town a mile away.

The policemen looked like men who knew a busier time was coming for them than they had had all day, and the men remaining on the open ground swore twice as fast to make up for the diminution in their numbers. There was high revelry in Nottingham, for a people's race day there is like no other race day in all England.

When it was dark night, when the wind had risen more, and the dust was blown about too thickly to see the stars overhead, Neal shook off his stupor by degrees. As the time approached for his meeting with Joe Webber, his sterner self came back; presently he should know what had become of his wife—what she had been doing perhaps all that long time wherein they had been apart? If she had not been with Tressider—never with Tressider—he should feel happier in mind, and less disgraced; he prayed that Joe might know all, at least—and would tell all. He would humour the mountebank for the whole truth—bribe him with money to confess it.

Neal went into the most reputable of all the disreputable booths, and had more brandy—with biscuits this time, which he ate in a corner of the tent, with a knot of young women in fancy hats laughing with a knot of young blackguards in fancy waistcoats at a table near him. They were laughing at him, but he paid no heed to them; one man hinted that he could fight him, and shouted out a defiance “to try it on,” as Neal rose to withdraw, and then the laughter of that drinking-place was exchanged for the dust and darkness without. It was a wild scene at night, with figures flitting up and down the sand-hills, and little knots of people here and there; with the watchful police hovering about, and the flare of lights from the tents on higher ground. There were drunken men upon the slopes, and others a trifle less drunk stumbling over them; a fight here and there, increasing now and then to a grand *mêlée*, when the police charged in their midst, and made matters clearer by their interference perhaps, although to an observer it did not readily appear so. Nine o'clock by Neal's watch—only one more hour to wait, and then this night's business to begin!

CHAPTER VI.

A HARD STRUGGLE.

DURING the last hour that Neal kept watch, the numbers thinned apace; the last batch of pleasure-seekers turned from Toppin's Circus; there were a few stragglers of the worst description lingering amongst the booths still, but respectability had gone to Nottingham, and "the children of night" remaining there were worthy of their sinister paternity.

Neal Galbraith patrolled in the vicinity of the caravan which Joseph Webber had indicated to him early in the day and which lay a few paces beyond the dimly-lighted booths, where the grass struggled with better results amidst the sandy soil. There was a light glimmering from the window of the caravan, and the shadow of some one within crossed and recrossed continually; there was a fire, too, for smoke was ascending from the zinc chimney in the roof; preparations for supper probably, for the dog, still a prisoner at the wheel, sniffed and whined piteously. It would soon be ten o'clock, thought Neal, and, after all, what good could result from his patience, his long journey, and weary vigils; from a man of Joseph Webber's stamp, what satisfactory explanations, under any circumstances, could be satisfactory to *him*?

Before it was ten by his watch, the window of the caravan had opened, and a plateful of bones had been tilted out to the dog—and a man who looked like Webber in the darkness had suddenly emerged from the background, tapped at the door, and been admitted. After that, all silent, until the hour of meeting came at length, and Neal, anxious to end what little mystery there might be, walked towards the caravan. The dog left off its bones to bark at him as he went up the steps and knocked upon the panels of the door; there were some hasty movements within the place before some one called to him "Who's there?"

"Mr. Galbraith," answered Neal.

"Mr. Galbraith is welcome," said a woman's voice. The door was opened, and the tall figure of Mrs. Webber stood in the aperture, with a hand extended to him.

Neal shook hands with her instinctively, and entered the caravan, the door of which was closed behind him.

A low, close room, the atmosphere of which was not pleasant to inhale, laden with mephitic vapours, and not entirely free from smoke that oozed its way through a crevice in the zinc chimney which passed from the little stove up the centre of the room and

through the roof. A den, rather than a habitation for human beings, with its space curtailed still more by a curtain that was slung across the caravan, and concealed one end from view. There was a table covered with a scanty supper cloth pushed into the opposite corner, and without much respect to sundry stage properties on which the legs were standing; there was Joe Webber, exhausted with his day's work, sitting in his shirt sleeves close to the fireplace, with his knees against the bars, and a short pipe in his mouth; and there was the giantess dropping on to a stool near her husband's and staring up at Neal after he had closed the door behind him.

"Will you take that chair, Sir?" said she. "Stools are more comfortable for me, in cribs like this, and saves me knocking my head about so much. We're glad to see you—it's better late than never!"

Neal glanced at the curtain as at something that might hide a mystery behind it, and then sat down with his back to it.

"There's nothing there that'll hurt you much, Sir," said Mrs. Webber, adverting to his glance; "that's only our second room—Joe calls it the bood-dror when he's in good spirits—which he aint to-night."

"I'm tired, girl," said Joe, restlessly; "I've been worked to death, and had no time to eat or drink till now."

"And now there hasn't been quite drink enough," added Selina, with a sigh, "but praps that's all the better, Joe, to-night."

"Perhaps it is," said Joe, shaking himself, as though he would make an effort to shake off his dulness, "now we're favoured with such company."

"I am here at your bidding," said Neal; "will you tell me all you know about—your sister?"

"She can tell you best," said Joe; "I've been *jawing* enough to-day, I think. She knows more than I, for that matter—and I've no hand in this. It goes against my grain a bit to see you here."

"Why should you bear me malice?—have I ever injured you?"

"I don't know but what you have—but I don't care to argue. *She*," taking his pipe from his mouth to indicate his wife with the stem, "can talk to you by the hour together—if she likes! This isn't my doing—let her work it out."

"I aint afraid—I aint nothing to be ashamed on, Joe."

"No, that's true—did I say you had, girl?"

And with this interrogative, Joe put his pipe in his mouth again, and screwed himself more apart from conversation. The giantess settled herself more firmly on the stool, clasped her large bony hands in her lap, and looked up with her wan, lined face at Neal—a face that trouble and a struggle for bread had scored more deeply than her years deserved. This thought, which might have crossed

Neal's mind for an instant, it was strange to find re-echoed by the woman.

"You're looking old enough, Mr. Galbraith."

"I have not grown young lately."

"Worried by business, praps?"

"No."

"Worried by that which upset more than you—and even troubled *him*," pointing to the tired acrobat at the stifling fire.

"Very likely. Will you tell me anything or not?" Neal said impatiently. "I cannot stay here—or breathe here long."

"It's the fust coming in and the coke—but you'll soon get used to it. I never has my health better than when I am jogging about the country in this fashion; but I was born in one, like—like many other conjurers' children," she added after a sudden pause.

Neal did not answer. Perhaps a studied silence to this woman's rambling would more quickly bring round the subject for which he had travelled, and had waiched all day.

The giantess paused after this for awhile; she looked at Joe, at Neal, over Neal's head at the checked shawl doing duty as a curtain, up at the wooden roof, cracked in many places, and blackened by foul air. Finding her theme in one or another of these, she began again.

"You came here to know about your wife—what made you think, Sir, that we could tell you anything?"

"A newspaper sent by post to me from Nottingham."

"I thought that might remind you of us—I sent that."

"I suspected it."

"Without Joe's knowledge—or the knowledge of anybody for that matter; entirely my own idea that was, and *he*," pointing to Joe again, "knewd nothing of it until he came back from seeing you this morning."

"Then she told me," muttered Joe.

"Then I told him, because he was put out about seeing you, and couldn't understand it. And Joe's a man that likes to know everything."

"And don't like," added Joe, "that you should keep a fellow in the dark. It isn't what I've done for you since we've been married—though it was a mercenary match enough."

"I don't think it was, sometimes, Joe," said Selina, with a smile to which Joe did not seem inclined to respond.

He was as anxious as Neal that this interview should terminate.

"You'll understand that I didn't quite expect you here," said the giantess, "but that I fancied there was just a chance that you would come."

"What did you want with me?"

"Well," she replied in a hesitating manner, "I hardly—know—exactly. I thought that praps it was just possible, that if I could

tell you where your wife was, and what she was doing, you might be sorry for your quarrel, and——”

“Say no more,” said Neal, more sternly; “I am not sorry—I have been grievously wronged—there was no excuse for that mad woman’s flight.”

“I don’t defend her, do I?” said the giantess. “I wouldn’t have done the same to Joe for all the world—I told her so many and many a time, and that it wasn’t in her sober senses that she did it. But still, it didn’t seem to me—an ignorant woman, with no fine notions, certainly—that it mightn’t be patched up atween you. She came to us in February, because——”

“And left my house in January!” quickly added Neal; “don’t explain her conduct; it is beyond any explanation that my wounded pride could ever accept. She came to you at last—well?”

“She told Joe all, and said that we was her only friends. Joe wasn’t the man to turn his back upon his sister, for she’d been kind to him, oh! heaps of times, and they two—odd uns, certainly—knew each other’s ways better than anybody else did. I wasn’t against it either, for she came in wretched and forlorn enough, and I’m a woman easily touched, you see. She stayed with us some months; she got a place as shopwoman for awhile, and then came to us again; then she got another place.”

“Where is she now?”

“Does that matter to you, who are so hard?” asked Mrs. Webber. “I allers said to Joe that I didn’t like your face much—that it was a heavy one, and you wouldn’t forgive in a hurry.”

“There are some offences which it is not honourable to forgive—hers was one. But——”

“But what?”

“But I would help her, if she is poor and trying to live honestly—I would bid you tell her that her father’s house is open to her, and her father anxious for her coming home.”

“What’s that?” exclaimed Joseph Webber.

Neal repeated his words, adding,

“If she go back to her father’s home—the fitting place for one who has repented of her error—I will allow her a fair income, so long as she lives honestly.”

“What do you keep talking of her honesty for?” cried Joe Webber, dashing his pipe into the grate, where it split into fragments; “I’d lay my life she’s more honest than you are!”

“She left my house,” said Neal.

He knew no excuse for that. For all but that there was forgiveness, perhaps, but to desert him—never

“Because you didn’t believe her—because you held her down, and told her of your hate; do you think that I don’t know this story?”

"She left my house," repeated Neal, gloomily.

"*You* come here with your talk of money for her!" cried Joe, more passionately—"why, I haven't any more spirit than money myself, but I wouldn't take a penny of you for her support—not I! You threw her off for some one else—you married her, and got tired of her—you made her life a misery, and think to pay her money will make her that much happier, and ease your conscience so much more. So far as I have a word in it, you may keep your money, and we'll starve together, the lot of us, before we'll ask it from you!"

"No, that's not sense," said the giantess, shaking her head; "it sounds very well—it's like the people talk on the stage—but it isn't like life, and it's very unlike you, Joe."

"I mean it!" cried Joe Webber.

Joe's manner proved the truth of his assertions just at that instant; but then Joe was not like himself, but a man verging closer upon heroism than he had ever bargained for—and Joe had been very fond of Carry.

"I don't say, Joe, that you don't," replied his wife, more cool and practical; "but you must think for Carry too, Joe. There come times—winter times generally—when we can't afford to keep ourselves, and she shares misery with us instead of home. Then a little money, Joe, is like a something out of heaven, to make us all bear up together better. And when I sent that paper to you, Mr. Galbraith, it just struck me that you might be glad to know your wife was with us, and that no thoughts of that man you were jealous of had anything to do with her going away from you."

"You cannot assure me of that any more than she could—only the Almighty knows beside herself with what intention she went away—whether she was disappointed in her first madness, and came on to you, or whether it was repentance after guilt, or what, I do not know—I will not seek to know. I have learned to be content with desolation; what lesson she has learned is of no interest to me."

"Ah! I see how hard you are," said the giantess; "you may be right enough in your ideas, and there aint many that would take my side. I—I don't stand up for her myself, for I wouldn't have done it, as I've said over and over again; but I think if you had given way earlier—much earlier—it mightn't have all ended in this style."

"A life's folly, to be rectified when life is everlasting—not here."

"So be it, then. Now, what money will you leave to help this woman you will never forgive?—who hasn't asked your forgiveness, but might be the better for it, for all that. Can you trust me, do you think, with money for your wife?"

"For the wife I had once," corrected Neal; "yes—I will trust you. I will leave with you five-and-twenty pounds, and you may tell

her from me that with every quarter, when I am assured of her well-doing, I will send the same amount—more, if it is required.”

Joe stared hard at the speaker—the giantess drew in her breath, and clasped her hands more tightly. Twenty-five pounds a quarter!—was it possible? Where did the money come from? In what way had this man become suddenly rich, to talk of large, almost incalculable sums in that way?

“Tell her from me, also, that I am learning to be resigned to the disgrace which she has brought upon me—that I have fought hard for that resignation, and it must not, shall not be disturbed! From her I never wish to hear directly. You understand me?”

“Yes.”

“When I have paid you this money,” he said, drawing out his purse, “I shall have done all that is necessary, and can return to London. My address I will also give you, and—*what's this?*”

To Neal's amazement, from some unknown quarter, as from a new world, there stood by his side a little child—dark-eyed, dark-haired—an ill-clad, rosy-faced, tottering child, that clung to his knees for support, and stretched out one tiny hand towards the purse he held. It had escaped from its cot behind the curtain, disturbed by the voices and the light.

Mrs. Webber gave a scream.

“You naughty child, go back!” she said, harshly; “how dare you come here?—go back, Carry, at once!—go back, I tell you!”

The child shrank away for an instant, and then pointed at Neal's purse again. Neal sat aghast, trying to shape his thoughts into one form—trying to believe! He looked at the white face of the woman crouching on the stool before the fire, and read alarm thereon, and confusion. Joseph Webber sat stolidly surveying the group with his broken pipe at his feet; there was some mystery yet, but the light was falling on it fast.

“Whose child is this?”

The little girl, alarmed by his energy, flew towards the giantess for refuge, and the woman put her arms about her, and held her tightly to her bosom.

“It doesn't matter whose it is, to you.”

“You called it Carry?”

“Well,” said the giantess, “I did!”

“Her child?—*her child?*”

“*And yours!*—born sixteen months ago in this caravan—sent, I think, to make a lonely woman's heart lighter. Afore she ran away, on the only time I ever troubled *your* house, she told me of its coming, and of her keeping it from you until she was sure—poor innocent! Ah! she was too fond of keeping back little secrets—and see now!”

“Her child—and *mine!*”

The purse fell from his hands to the table, and his hands dropped

to his side. His child! He could believe that; he had had his faint hope of that, and held his peace also; once he had pictured much future happiness, with God's blessing, in store for him. But the happiness had vanished, and God's blessing had never been bestowed upon him—hence the solitariness of his life! His child dragging an existence out in that caravan!—to be brought up in penury, and to go wrong early—thrown early, as she would be, into the temptations besetting an existence so nomadic and crude—his child, that no one had a right to keep away from him!—who had not sinned against him with the mother!—and for whom his heart yearned strangely.

He became suddenly calm—but his face expressed a new resolution, that the giantess saw and paled at still more.

"How old is she?"

"Sixteen months. She was born on the 13th of March, 18—. I wrote it down."

"And she lives here with you?—how often does her mother come to see her?"

"Oh! when she can."

"See if *she* will come to me?"

The giantess did not release her hold immediately—even for an instant seemed to enfold her niece more strictly in her embrace. then she let go, her arms dropped to her side, and Neal took out his watch and held it gleaming in the candlelight. The child hesitated, looked at Neal, and tottered away from Mrs. Webber towards the golden trinket, her little arms outstretched, and her great dark eyes distending more with every step. It was the first thrill of happiness that Neal had known for a long time, and it made his chest heave and his lip quiver. He marked the smile upon the face, and though it was his wife's smile, it did not deter him; he could see his own face there, he fancied—a pencil sketch of him, drawn by his father twenty years ago, and kept by that father reverently, seemed very like this little girl!

He drew his daughter on his knee, and let the watch remain in her hand. His brow contracted with thoughts, intense and anxious, and his arm stole round the child's, as Mrs. Webber's had done a moment since. There was a long silence, and the giantess nervously glanced at father and daughter more than once. It was a strange position—a strange meeting!

"I think she'd better go to sleep again," the giantess said at last.

"Not yet."

Another pause, then Neal said,

"This child you would not have told me anything concerning—and yet my claim to her is first and paramount. Why keep this truth back?"

"It was wished—that's all."

"To make amends for the mother's faults, and give me one object in life worth pursuing—and yet to keep her back! To ruin her, body and soul, by a selfishness that ties her to a wretched career, when I could have saved her by a word. This must not be!"

"What do you mean?" gasped the giantess, rising to her feet, and standing against the door.

"I mean to take her away!" replied Neal, rising too; "and there is no one here can stay me. Tell her mother that I claim my child—that I will not have her tainted by the mother's teaching, or ruined by an example which with every year will become powerful for evil. Let me pass, woman!"

"Wait a bit, and let us talk of this, please," said the giantess, hoarsely; "I don't see that you can—I don't know that you can—I don't think that you ought. Joe!"

Joe did not move. From his place by the fire he muttered,

"I can't help. You've brought this all upon yourself—now fight it out."

"I save the girl—I give her a new life; an honest home, and a fair future lies before her. Woman! would you condemn her to your own existence, even if you had the power?"

"Sit down again—five minutes more, if you will, for all of us to think—I ask you, Sir, humbly."

Neal sat down with his arm round the girl still, and she, still interested in the watch, remained wondering and destructive. Then there ensued a long silence; the gaunt, haggard woman crouched upon her stool again, and looked intently, intensely, over Neal's head at the curtain, which swayed a little to and fro, and was unperceived by Neal.

"I don't say it aint the best," murmured the giantess at last; "if she was my own flesh and blood, I might even part with her, for her own sake. She would grow up a better woman than ever she can here—I see that; and"—flinging her long arms wildly before her, as though appealing to some hidden witness—"it's as well to think of *that*. But——"

She came to an abrupt conclusion, and glared beyond Neal in a bewildered fashion, that would have aroused Neal's suspicions had he been watching her. But he was interested in his child; he had made up his mind, and he took no heed.

"But," she added, after a time, "it isn't right to take the baby away. When she's older, perhaps, and can understand, and feel a mother's loss—but not now. I don't think that that's right."

"I can have no interference," said Neal calmly. "You had no right to keep me in ignorance of this child's existence—it is punishable by law."

The tall woman shrank at the name of the law; the law was stern and hard, and she was poor and had no friends.

Neal rose once more, and again the woman rose with him and set

her back against the door. Joe sat still impassive, and the child still clutched the watch.

"Let me pass. I have idled time too long here. I claim my child, and pay you for all trouble with that purse. Now let me go."

"Two more minutes, please," said Mrs. Webber, "and then, if everybody thinks it best—why, you must go."

"It's best," muttered Joe; "we never could afford to keep her long—and Mr. Galbraith's right for once. No thanks to me for saying so," said Joe, as though he expected Neal's gratitude for his opinion; "you're not my friend—you've done your best to kill my sister—but I speak the truth."

"Another minute—only one minute more. Give *everybody* time to think," his wife said; "and then there needn't be any reproaches afterwards."

Another minute, and then the tall woman moved away from the door, and burst into tears.

"It's the best that can happen; but she's like a gal of my own, and hard to part with. But it's the best—the best! Here, take her little hat and shawl, and wrap this extra comfitter about her neck—it's the best. Keep strong all on us! You must write, and tell us of the child—we shall come and ask if you don't. God bless her!—let me put her things on behind there—I won't play you false."

"Put them on here—the child is quiet enough."

Neal was distrustful and retained his hold. That strange craving to take the child home gathered force with every instant; it was a new hope for him, and he would not chance the losing of it.

The baby-girl murmured and struggled a little beneath her hasty dressing—the gold watch lost half its attractions—the dark-faced man, in whose arms she was, became more repellent.

"There, go before she cries," said the giantess. "I kiss her for myself—here, I kiss her for her mother, who will keep strong I hope! Here, Joe, don't sit snivelling there—you won't let the gal go without kissing her, though you don't like children much?"

The watch dropped and hung by the length of chain—the child's instinct knew whence help would come! Then were a pair of tiny arms outstretched, and a feeble little voice whimpering forth—"Mum—ma!"

Neal moved more rapidly with his prize; the child had begun crying. Neal's hand was on the door. Webber was standing with his back against the stove, and his wife with hands outstretched, was watching Neal's departure, muttering still, as though it were a spell—"For the best it is—keep strong! keep strong!"

"Mum—ma!"

Then, as if by the working of that spell, or by the breaking through it, the curtain at the end of the room was torn down, and, with a shriek of agony, a woman, with hair dishevelled, and a ghost's face, rushed across the room, and clutched her child.

"No—you shan't have her, and with her every hope of mine! I thought it might be best till now, and that I had the strength to give her up; but I can't!—I can't!—I won't!"

"*You here!*" gasped forth Neal.

"Curse me if you will!—say what you will, and think your worst, I care not!" she cried. "I am a desperate woman, and will not part with my darling—she is mine as much as yours, and is my only tie to life. Give her to me, I say!"

Neal had shaken the child suddenly from her grasp, and held her above the mother's head. He had a claim to that girl—he could not part with her at the appeal of this demented woman.

Carry wrung her hands piteously together, and with a cry that echoed through the room, and thrilled all hearts, she fell at the feet of him whom an unpardonable step had for ever alienated from her.

"Oh! give me my little girl!" she entreated; "I have been very wrong in thought and deed to leave you—I know that there is no pardon for it, and I will not ask it ever—but, oh! don't take my child away, for Christ's sake. You can't tell what a mother's love is, or how one life is bound up with the other—or how you stab me to the soul by claiming her. Don't take her!—oh! don't take her!"

"To be brought up in ignorance and distress—to be ever apart from a father who could have taught her better," said Neal in stifling tones.

"Oh! don't take her!" moaned Carry again.

"It is my duty."

"It is not," wailed forth the mother, "not yet—not suddenly. Oh! give me time to think of this—to prepare for parting with my little girl, and not strike me down by taking her away all at once like this. In a year's time—give me one year, and, as I am a sinner, here kneeling at your feet, and calling to my God to witness all I say, I swear that I will give her up to you. But not now! I can't!"

"In a year's time I will claim her for her soul's sake—take her now, and remember your promise. Let me escape from this."

He thrust the child into the mother's arms, which closed upon her like a vice; he tore open the door and leaped from the caravan into the sandy earth. He was a man haunted by all the hopes that he had had once, and which mocked him with their utter unapproachableness in that hour of awful trial. He dashed on recklessly, with the child's cry and the mother's wailing in his ears—all was misery and desolation.

He struggled on through the darkness—amidst the wreck of tent and booth—amidst the wreck of humanity still flitting to and fro like evil spirits—and made his way down the hill, fighting through the wind and blinding dust to Nottingham.

CHAPTER VII.

MORE STRUGGLING.

THE next day a telegram from Neal Galbraith, Edleigh Villa, Streatham, arrived from London, addressed to Mrs. Joseph Webber, Toppin's Circus, Nottingham Race Ground. It reached there in the evening, and was a long message for the wires.

"I rely on the good faith of the mother of my child. I ask that mother to remember her promise for her daughter's sake. The money left behind is for the use of child and mother—when more is needed write to me, and it shall be forwarded. In a year's time, on July the 21st, 18—I expect my daughter home."

Carry read this message day after day, in her wanderings from place to place with Toppin's Circus; a woman who had lost much strength, and was at all times and seasons an incumbrance to a household. She knew this now; she felt that there were times when they were tired of her—Joe and his wife—when money was short, and Toppin did not pay, and every scrap of bread was an extra expense; but that they were both too good-hearted, too good-tempered, to pain her by a word.

After Neal's visit, and Neal's money—from which Joseph Webber did not recoil so readily the next morning—they were kinder to her than before; but that might not have been for the money's sake, but for the remembrance of that night of terrible struggling.

Carry had not intended that Neal should see her child, when Joe brought home the news of Neal being on the race course; but she had planned that hiding place behind the curtain, and had been throughout the day strangely anxious to see Neal, to hear his comments, however harsh, upon that lower estate to which she was reduced. He had come, her child had escaped from concealment, and then the great trial had commenced; and, till the last, despite her sorrow and pain, she had thought it best that the child should go away with him whom she had called her husband once. But at the last she could not part with her.

After Neal's message, there was much to think of. Before it, on the night following his departure, there was a vague hope that he would not remind her of her promise ever again; that the excitement of the interview over, he would see the cruelty of taking away her little girl, and leave her to the one solace which the world afforded yet. But after the message, she remembered that she had sworn to that resignation, and it was only by that oath her little Carry remained another year with her.

It was cruel!—it was like him! Why should her child be stolen

away from her at an age when it would be like death—would possibly *be* death!—to give her up? By what right should she be compelled to make so great a sacrifice? She asked this indignantly of Mrs. Webber sometimes, and then ensued long arguments between them, in which the giantess sided first with Neal, and gave way at last when Carry spoke of the mother's love, and charged her with the home question, of what she would do if it were her child?

This poor woman could reason best with herself, after all. The happiness of her child ever before her own—for where was the latter to be found?—and the future of her child when she was dead, what would that be like? Life with the mountebanks, travelling from fair to fair, brought up with them, taught their tricks, constituted an infant prodigy, and christened by a French or Spanish name—life with an ignorant and not too moral class—could she condemn her child to all that, for the sake of a few years' selfish comfort with her. She remembered all the stern words that Neal had uttered as reasons for taking away his daughter—they were hard, but they were just. She dashed down all her child's chances by the opposition. But that man who never gave way, what would he teach that daughter?—would he tell her of the mother's history, and, by his perversion of the facts, constitute it a story of a mother's shame? Teach her to look back upon that mother not as a woman whose judgment was at fault, and whose headstrong folly hewed out for herself a life of misery and isolation, but a wicked woman whom it was best to forget, and painful to allude to? No, it must not end like that; better to break her oath, and run away from all of them, leaving no trace by which to find her. Then came the thought that after her flight she might die; that there would be no one to claim her girl, who would be transferred from parish to parish, remaining for ever unrecognised—drifting from the workhouse to a world of harsh taskmasters, from whom a word would have saved her years ago. What should she do?—what could she do?

One thought always came back from reasoning like this—it *was* best to part with her. Best for the child, who should be the first thought, and for whom a mother's love should be prepared to make any sacrifice—despite that awful loneliness which must follow such a parting.

Now and then she thought of her father and mother in Shepherd Street, and of the advice that Neal had given concerning them. How should he know that her father's house was open to her? Was it likely that her father would forgive her transgressions more readily than Neal?—she looked back at him as she had seen him last: cold, stern, and emphatic; he had never felt for Joe's temptations or forgiven them—years of separation affected him not—it was his boast that he was made of iron, and knew nothing of those fine things called "feelings." To any other home she could have returned, but not to her father's. She could not face the hard words that would

meet her, or the unmerciful hand that would dash in her face the gates of home. Joe was sure enough, too, that that would be a journey for nothing; the father's character was a decisive one, and both thought of it with a hopelessness that no words of Neal's could affect. Some day, perhaps, some long day hence—when he was old, and feeble, and alone—when the mother was dead, he might, for his own comfort's sake, afford her shelter; but that was doubtful, and she would not think of it just yet.

But she would give up her little Carry—she would keep her word. In the winter time, when Toppin had dismissed Webber and his wife, for fresh novelties, when they were all stranded in Manchester, and Joe could only find money for drink—when the child complained of food and hunger, and she was in the way, terribly in the way of everybody, Carry sank her mother's love, her woman's pride, and wrote to Neal.

It was a wild letter—wild as her own moods had ever been through life—and Neal did not read it unmoved. If there had never crossed his mind the one thought of pardoning this woman, there had been in his heart, since his strange meeting with her, a different and less angry feeling. She had wronged him none the less by her departure—her life for ever after that night of parting was a mystery to him, and could not be explained—but he saw her weakness more clearly, and could at times afford to pity her. He had been brought up to believe in woman's obedience to her husband; he remembered his mother as patient, dutiful, and loving; his own idea of marriage was framed from a higher standard than poor Carry had ever known. Carry was weak, wilful, and ill-trained, and Neal was the soul of honour, despite his sternness, and that oldness of thought, which was the result of his strange youth. It was an ill-match, and trouble had evolved from it in consequence. By the law governing ill-assorted couples, trouble must come as surely as the seasons, and they are wiser in their generation than Neal and Carry, if they live down the storm.

Neal was moved by Carry's letter, but he was glad to receive it. It ended suspense with him, for he had lost the clue to Toppin's Circus for awhile, and then, finding it by agents whom he had sent in search, he learned that Joseph Webber and his wife were no longer of the company. He had wished to send money for the support of Carry and her child—but the opportunity had not been forthcoming, and his ignorance of their whereabouts was adding a deeper gloom to him, when the letter brought him hope.

"I write to you, Sir, offering my child. God help me, I see that it is best. She shall be brought to Streatham next week; and may the father be kind and good to her, and teach her to think of her mother in all charity and love. I make no promise not to see my child some long day hence. I will not have that promise exacted from me by you or any one, but I will do my best to keep away—to

see her at a distance, where my presence shall never offend you or yours. I am prepared to go abroad for awhile—for ever, if I can. I am reduced low enough to ask even you for money."

Neal pitied her still more; for the first time since his wife's desertion of him, there came a strange yearning in his heart towards her—a belief that, at least, her life had been pure, and that, even at the eleventh hour, he could safely take her back again. But it was a momentary impulse, and he checked it for the world's sake—for the sake of the moral.

Where she had lived, how she had lived, must remain ever unsatisfactory and vague, and he would not seek to fathom the enigma; even she did not desire to return to him; she was aware that they were irrevocably sundered, that it was best and right. Well, such a passing thought—the thought of a fool, who shut his eyes to his own honour—should never cross him again. There are some faults, he had said, in the wretched home of the Webbers, that it was dishonourable to pardon—this was the first and greatest.

But he would send her money—she should not have the temptation of poverty to struggle against—he could not bear the thought of her enduring privation; he sat before the fire with the letter on his knees, and thought of the boy's love—that infatuation which had carried everything before it, swept down opposition, and made her his wife. A boy's romance, but a man's tragedy. He drew his breath with pain in that lonely room, from which he rigorously excluded all intruders, and for the first time—he believed it was for the first—the hot tears sprang into his eyes, dimming the fire-light. His heart was softened, but whether with the hope that was coming to him, or the trials that a wilful woman had brought upon herself and him, he did not seek to know.

Late in the following week, when he had begun to fear that the resolution of his wife had undergone some change, the child was brought to him by Mrs. Joseph Webber. He had told Mrs. Higgs the story, or some portion of it, and the faithful housekeeper came in, pale and anxious, with the news. It was night-time, and Neal was in the study, wherein he never read, and seldom wrote, and which he only sought when troubled.

"Come!" she said. "Oh! dear—so like you—and so thinly dressed. Oh! that poor gal, her mother."

"Who brings the child?"

"Joe's wife."

"Let her come in here, and now leave us for a time. I wish to speak to her."

Mrs. Webber, leading Carry's child by the hand, came into the room shortly afterwards; she looked more gaunt and haggard than ever, for the winter had set in hard, and made times harder. The child was pale and haggard also, as though she had been ill. "If she should not live!" thought Neal, at once.

"You should have written to me before," said Neal; "you wanted help—and this girl has been half starved."

"Her mother would not let us," said the giantess, "she keeps her pride still, poor woman!"

"Poor woman!"

"Ah! p'raps you're sorry now, Sir? It wasn't all her fault."

"I never suffer myself to be lured into a discussion on this subject. You will please to be silent."

"Ah! you're in you're own house now, and can be the master," said Mrs. Webber, coldly; "and a fine house it is to have dropped to your share. Lucky for you—lucky, I hope, to this little motherless thing here."

"I am glad that you have all thought it the wisest step to place her in her father's charge."

"I always thought that, Sir, so far as the child is concerned, of course—we can't expect *you* to think anything about the mother."

"No," said Neal, moodily.

"I have a message from her."

"Well!"

Little Carry was drowsy with the night-air through which she had travelled, and after one wondering stare at the bronze chandelier, the books and cases, she nestled closer to her aunt's breast, and went to sleep there.

"She begs me to tell you again that she claims the right to see her child—when and where she likes——"

"*When* she likes," corrected Neal.

"Ah! she said nothing about the where—and she hopes that the girl may be taught to pray for her mother, and not to forget her mother ever. She don't mind if even, some day, you tell her the story—just as it happened, and how it happened, Sir. She thinks that when this child grows up to be a woman, that kind of story may be understood and—pitied like."

"It may."

"I won't tell you that it's been a fight even now to part with her," said the giantess, wiping her eyes hastily with the tattered fringe of her shawl; "or how Carry went on at the last. You know how wild she can be—and what a babby in many things she is. But we were druv very hard—and I think it hurt her most to give the gal up afore the year was out."

"What is she doing?" said Neal, looking at the fire, and not at his companion.

"Nothing—now."

"She has been doing—what?"

"Helping us with needlework—tidying up Joe's properties, and so on. Not earning a great deal for herself ever. Once we nearly persuaded her to rehearse for the "Flower Girl of Barcelona," but

she altered her mind suddenly, and 'wouldn't try it—and put out nicely Toppin was about it! And then——”

“That will do—no more of a history like that; I am not interested in it. She is in want of money?”

“The lot of us—no doubt of that.”

“I will not forget you.”

He went to his library table, and sat down before it. When he had opened a drawer, he thought again.

“Has she ever expressed a wish for any course of life?”

“To go abroad—very often,” said the giantess. “She’s a good scholar, and thinks that she might get a governess’s place out in Americkey. p’raps. She would go to-morrow if she had the chance.”

“It would be better for all.”

“P’raps so. I don’t see where the end of the bother is to be, unless she goes away, or dies. Bless you, she’ll not keep away from this child three weeks.”

Neal shuddered. He saw the difficulties already in the way—of the fight between him and his wife for that child’s love. If she would only go abroad, and give her daughter time enough to love him, and forget *her*!

“Here are fifty pounds for her present expenses. If she go abroad, or if she stay here, I am desirous of paying an annual sum for her support.”

“She’ll never take it unless druv hard, as we’ve been this year.”

“She may wish to go abroad at once, and prefer to receive a sum—any sum she may choose to name, and which is in my power to afford—that will enable her to commence some business.”

He did not speak of her father’s home again. He was selfish in his interest for her, and already concerned for the girl whose whole life might be shadowed by the mother.

“I’ll tell her.”

“Let me know her decision—let me know to-morrow what your expenses have been of keeping that child and her so long—let me thank you and your husband.”

“What for?” said Mrs. Webber, stolidly; “it was for your wife’s sake, and, though I shan’t turn my back against the money that you offer—for I aint proud in that way, and it’s your right, though you mayn’t think so—it was never for your sake, Mr. Galbraith.”

“Will you give me the child now, and take that money?”

“Yes.”

“Will you tell her what I have said, and write to me to-morrow?”

“To-morrow, or the next day.”

The tall woman rose, and put the child into Neal’s arms, still sleeping, still too young to know anything of a mother’s grief at parting with her, or to be sorrowed by that mother’s history.

"God bless her, and give her a good father!" murmured the woman, kissing the child sleeping in Neal's arms.

"I think He will."

"What your side of the story may have been, I don't know," she said; "but hers don't make you quite the husband that you might have been."

"I do not expect her to speak more justly of me than she has acted by me. Will you leave me now?"

"I am going. Good-night, Sir."

"Good-night."

She came back to kiss the child again, and then she went away to meet Mrs. Higgs in the hall, lingering under the lamp there for this visitor.

"This is strange—and not too strange to do good, I hope. We want good here!" said Mrs. Higgs.

"I don't wish that it mayn't come, Mrs. Higgs," said the giantess sorrowfully.

"What has become of her?"

"Away in the country."

"With Joe—isn't she?"

"Yes."

"Let her see her father—he has altered very much; tell her to turn to her duty there, and ask God to keep her good," said Mrs. Higgs; "tell her that an old woman says that last prayer every night of her life."

"I will tell her."

"What's Joe doing?"

"Oh! he's about the same—he hasn't got tired of *me* yet."

And with this sad irony—this Parthian dart at him to whom she had entrusted Carry's child—she went out and closed the street door after her.

She stood there waiting under the portico, as though expecting the door to open again, and did not move away until the chain was drawn across it from within. Then she hastened on, and stopped not till she came upon the dark and breezy common at a little distance from Neal Galbraith's house. She hurried at once to a long low seat facing the road, and then stopped, with a sudden cry that she suppressed.

"Not here!" she gasped.

She had a knowledge of the place before—when she was a girl she had lived at Lower Norwood, and strayed often hither. She knew well the common, and a fear, sharp and sudden, beset her of danger to any one despairing there. She ran on to a deep, dark sheet of water, swollen with recent rains, and stood on the brink looking wildly round her. Then she gave a cry of joy, and sat down by the figure of a woman huddled on the bank and staring at the water.

"Carry—Carry, dear—I'm so glad I've found you!"

"Are you?—what for?"

"Why, because I am," was the childish answer; "you said you'd wait on the seat till I came back, and when you wasn't there, I had such *funny*, curious thoughts!"

"That I might make away with myself in the Streatham ponds, thinking that I was of no further use to anybody, and had lost every tie worth living for—every tie that made life bearable."

"We don't know what may come."

"If I had only had the courage!—such a courage as that man had who came to Fife Street before he took the poison."

"Hush!—hush! Carry, you mustn't think like this."

"I came down here," with a shudder, "to look at the water, but I hadn't the nerve. I was always a fool and a coward, Selina."

"Come away."

"You left the girl?—he has her?—he could have the heart to take her away from me! Oh! this is all your fault—it begins with you!"

"You may thank me for it some day."

"Well, I may—I may," she said spasmodically. "I'm too wretched now to be just. Did she wake?—was she frightened at him?—oh! did she miss me and look round for me?"

"She slept all the time."

"She will wake up and wonder where I am; and be scared by every face she sees, and cry for me! And, God help me, I shall never hear her cry again!—oh! never, never!"

She flung herself upon the neck of her sister-in-law, and sobbed wildly and passionately, like a child herself; and the woman, who had shared much trouble and privation with her, held her to her breast, and tried to comfort her by words of promise, that had little meaning in them, and were only suited for a child.

In her weakness, the desolate mother could resist such efforts to assure her of a better time; though the end of her troubles had been reached, and there was no greater agony to come—there lay no hope beyond! All was gone now!

* * * * *

Two days afterwards, later in the day, a letter from Mrs. Joseph Webber came to Neal. A rambling, ill-spelt, worse written letter, alluding, in a business way, to the money which had been spent for Carry's maintenance, and estimating it at some small sum per week. Business matters settled by this business woman, there followed information concerning the wife. Carry had resolved to go abroad at once; before that letter reached Neal she would have paid for her passage in the *Edgar*, sailing-ship, and from the money sent her there would be sufficient to commence life again in America. She

would attempt it, at least; she required no further help just now; she hoped that she never should. Some day she might return to see her child; she prayed that that child might remember her, and that nothing might be ever said to make that child think ill of her.

Neal sent the money to the giantess; he would have sent a further sum to Carry, but was startled by a notice in the paper that the *Edgar* sailed that day from Liverpool, at four p.m. He could not define his motives—he never sought their definition—but he hurried down to Liverpool to see the ship depart; and only learned that it had sailed half-an-hour earlier from the docks, taking advantage of fair wind and weather.

He went back full of thought—oppressed now and then by a sorrow, that might almost be akin to remorse, and again by a hope that the new life—the better life—was stretching out for him and his child.

Life had its duties for him again, and he could brace his nerves for a struggle with it, and take his place once again with the workers. A better time for all he prayed, even for that erring woman, who had tired of him and his home, and shaped a different course out for herself.

She had gone away, and by the sacrifice that she had made, he could think more kindly of her,—almost forgive her. And when the news came presently that the *Edgar* had been met by winter storms at sea, and gone down with all hands, he sank on his knees—this stern man, who had been proud of his uncharitableness—and asked mercy for himself as well as her!

BOOK VI.

BEGINNING AFRESH.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARCH-PLOTTER.

NEAL GALBRAITH took his place once more in the world, then. He had outlived that dark season, which had at one time foreboded an estate like unto his father's in the worst days; the gloom that had oppressed him for so long was shaken off by one earnest effort, although till his dying day he bore ever that grave, almost sorrowful, look which early cares had set upon him.

He was ever a thoughtful man; but he chafed no more at opposition to his will; and he was no longer content with sitting idly in the dusk, whilst men more energetic strove for fortune. He had been without a motive in the world, until the discovery of his child; then there were hopes ahead of him, and some-one besides his father to live for.

There were times when he would pause and wonder at his new thoughts, and if their brighter character were attributable to something else besides the possession of his daughter. Could it be possible that he was glad of his wife's death?—that to feel that misguided woman was no longer of the world, was to be less borne down by the weight of a great calamity? No, he did not think that; for his heart was lighter on the day his child came home, and he had grieved for the sad end of one so young and wilful, and who, estimating him more fairly, might have been content with him.

He could judge her now with less partiality for his own wrongs; he could see where he had been severe when kindness should have replaced severity, and where a word in season would have saved much evil. He took his share of blame; he had been too young to marry; he had known too little of his bride; he had been wise in his own conceit, and played the master rather than the husband; he had lured a woman from a home that had been ever miserable to her, and set her in his own house, where there was but little sympathy. He had chosen for life a woman that was not free from faults, and for those faults he had had no mercy, but opposed them with foibles of his own, whence had evolved disunion.

He was sorry for the ending of the story, for he had loved that woman passionately, and was looking forward to much happiness with her, at the time that she was beginning to distrust him. He had resented that distrust in preference to offering explanation, and so the whole story of misconception, jealousy, and rage, and the bubble bursting in the sun.

Well, they could never have been man and wife, and philosophy told him how much better it was that all had ended thus; better for the woman whose last act was a noble sacrifice, by which he held her memory dearer; better for the man who had been ever oppressed by the consciousness of a woman alone in the world, bearing his name, and facing much temptation. Until she had gone down in the *Edgar*, he did not think that any love, respect, or faith, remained for her; then he felt assured that he had loved her to the end of the story, and it was that baffled passion, the mortification of being misunderstood, that had rendered him so desperate and relentless.

If he could begin again from the night of that great quarrel; if he and she with the bandage from their eyes could once more turn back to that day, and live again the story, what a light upon the after-pages! He thought so with the consciousness of things neglected, and chances thrown away; but had the sea given up its dead, would he have taken her to his heart, forgetful of their years of separation, and the life that they had lived apart? It was doubtful; Neal never asked himself that question—he did not think of it. The wife was dead, and her loss had troubled and chastened him; he was a different and a better man.

He was Pike's partner before the summer came—ere the summer was ended, they were working side by side; two business men with confidence in the result of their energy; both careful, patient, and hard-working, as befitted the principals of firms in the bud. They were like brothers now, and had for each other a brother's interest and love. Neal had discovered the real merit of his partner, and valued it at its just worth—between him and Pike there would never come dissension again. There might pass above them a cloud, born of business life and City struggles, but never the doubt to set them at arm's length. They might sorrow together—never apart!

Meanwhile little Carry thrived apace. The change was good for her—a large house, a careful nurse in Mrs. Higgs, all that could tend to benefit a child, and give it strength and health, were forthcoming, and were repaid by a nature naturally affectionate. The mother, alas! had been a fugitive thing to mourn for, and when the winter had come round again, the reminiscence of that fair care-lined face was very far away and misty. Then the *Edgar* had been a wreck twelve months, and Neal was rising in the world, and seeing his way with Pike to independence.

Neal betrayed more than a father's fondness for this child; it was an absorbent love, that his business friends might have laughed at. It was a love that stood between him and the office books, and took him home regularly after business hours, to devote the rest of the evening to his daughter. It was more like a mother's fondness than the grave, far-away love of a father; it made every sacrifice for the child's enjoyment, and was intensely jealous if she seemed to love another for an instant better than him. Such love is always repaid

by a child quick to find out the idolater, and Neal was happy and grateful enough for the return. It pleased him to witness that preference for him before Mrs. Higgs and his old father—he felt that the latter were neglected, along with the new toys, when his welcome knock was heard. As the little dark-haired girl came rushing into his arms, the tears rose into his eyes, and he would hide them in the raven tresses showering about her face. He was becoming happy in his way—and for the calmness of his life he was a grateful man.

He was warned more than once that he would spoil his daughter; that to grant every wish and to fiercely resent any attempt to thwart her, would bring its punishment, and do much harm; but he paid no heed to that. He had been stern enough in his day; he should win more love if he were gentle, and if his little girl loved him for his thoughts of her, why, nothing more was needed. In a few years there would only remain themselves to care for one another—and be to each other father and daughter, always loving and true!

He told this, or something like this, to David Pike, when that methodical gentleman was startled by broken ornaments, damaged bells, and time pieces with the hands wrenched off, at Neal's house.

"Ah! very true, perhaps—but it isn't the right way. A wilful child is likely to grow up a wilful woman, Neal."

Neal drew a deeper breath at this. A wilful woman like her mother, perhaps, a woman who might marry and make some home wretched by her rash resistance—he had not thought of that. Still he had not the heart to check her; he saw her only after office hours, and knew nothing of the day's excitement she had created for the nurse-maid, for Mrs. Higgs, and the grandfather. Anticipating the exercise of his authority they had troubled him at one time with many complaints; but he had listened dreamily, and then set her on his knee to play with that watch which had first tempted her when she was at Nottingham with the strollers.

"There's plenty of time, Pike," Neal said, on another occasion, when his friend had been prompted by Mr. Galbraith, senior, to urge a second remonstrance; "she's very young—wait till her mind is formed."

"I—I really think that it's getting very alarming," said Mr. Pike, for little Carry had been carried away to bed in a paroxysm of rage that evening; "you *should* exercise a mild, but firm authority."

"She would not have cried if I had promised that she should sit up to supper."

"At her age!—good gracious!"

"We don't sup late—and I see so little of her, Pike."

"If you should ever marry again, what a difficulty you are preparing for the wife, by giving that child her own way."

"If I should ever marry again!—does that possibility still strike you, then?"

"Sometimes," said Mr. Pike, blushing.

"I ask you again to dismiss it from your thoughts. I am living for my daughter now."

"Your daughter may marry some years hence, and leave you a solitary man."

"Don't talk of Carry marrying!—you chilled my blood for hours before with that idea, Pike. Let the evil day keep in the background till my flower has blossomed."

"I'll say no more just now."

Mr. Pike went home very thoughtful and disconsolate. His old wish, that old, old train of thought had beset him lately, though he could not see his way clearly to the end. The road was open now, and man and maiden were both free! It was the great hope of his life to marry Neal to Addie; before Neal's marriage he had thought of it; to Neal's widowerhood the dream had come again. Here was a gentle, pious woman, calculated to make Neal happy, and take much happiness in another's rejoicing—who would enhance his comfort, and be a good mother to his child—and here was Neal free to choose her, just the man for her, earnest, full-hearted, grave, with a soul above frivolities, and yet there was no motive force to make them more than friends. Such a couple as they would be, understanding each other so well, and all the better for companionship together; and yet to never think of falling in love with one another! In all his experience, he had never remembered anything one-half so disheartening.

That Addie had had some foolish sentimental liking for a flashy young man of the name of Tressider, was nothing to the purpose now, any more than that Neal had been once madly in love with Carry Webber. Love dies out and is renewed again—and the second passion may be more worthy than the first, and more enduring—why should these two stand apart in life? Once more he assumed the character of plotter—ever a clumsy part with him—and did his best to put Addie on her guard against his insidious designs. Addie watched her uncle's plans, and thought with a sigh of the folly of an idea that her confession should have dissipated long since; but she did not speak again of the vanity and vexation to follow his manœuvres. There was not any progress made, and she could afford to wait awhile.

Neal and Addie did not meet very frequently. The uncle took his niece with him to Streatham occasionally, but she was more of a favourite with the old gentleman than the young one—or, at all events, received a greater amount of attention—and she had a great deal to say to Mrs. Higgs. Mr. Pike did not see his way clearly to Neal's visits to his own house—Neal, who was always talking of his Carry, and anxious to get home to her; but he was seized

with a new idea at last, and it succeeded better than he dreamed.

Mr. Pike and Addie were both fond of children, and their neighbours had a few to lend them, now and then—Mr. Pike was struck with the harm that might attach to the moral growth of a girl without companionship of her own age.

"That child will become old-fashioned, Neal," he said.

"Become thoughtful and a little odd, perhaps—where is the harm?"

"The brain expands, and the cranium, which is soft in adolescence, expands with it, and becomes a preternatural size, and the child stands an excellent chance of dying—that's all!"

"What!" shouted Neal.

This was a flying conversation over the desks for once, but the arrow was aimed well by Mr. Pike, and struck the mark intended.

"Who told you that?"

"Oh! I have studied that sort of thing a little, you know."

"Where am I to find playfellows for the child? My neighbours hold themselves aloof from me or I from them—I scarcely know which now."

"Send her to school."

"To be browbeaten at her age? Why, it would break her heart!"

"Bring her to our house more often, and let my neighbour's children meet her there. There's a capital room where they can run about—the lot of them."

"Thank you—it's very kind of you, Pike. I'll think of it."

Mr. Pike opened his desk suddenly, and put his head therein to smother a chuckle, that must inevitably escape him. Neal had snapped at the bait, and good might follow from this pleasant scheming. He was right in his ideas of companionship for children, but they certainly had not troubled his mind a great deal, and he blushed to find himself so artful.

Neal went readily enough to Hackney with his daughter; he took his father with him also, and the old gentleman, who had given up sketching and inventing lately, joined the children, and went up stairs with them into "the capital room" that Mr. Pike had eulogised, and was most excellent company there.

That evening, little Carry, flushed with excitement, breathless with her play, came bounding into her father's arms, to whisper how happy she was; and Neal saw that Mr. Pike's reasoning was correct enough.

So Neal Galbraith took his child very often to Mr. Pike's house, and saw a great deal in these latter days of Addie Merton. Addie had grown very staid, he thought, but she was always very amiable. He began to wonder whom she would marry in the times ahead of her, and what had become of young Hedger, whom he had seen

once smitten by calf-love. Looking at her, he could believe with Mr. Pike in her power to make home worthy of its name—and he thought that it was not very strange for his child to take to her suddenly, as to a young bright-faced mother.

These were thoughts verging on a new idea, but they did not disturb Neal's heart, if they crossed his mind at times, and more often crossed it as the world went round.

And Addie Merton, on her guard against the enemy, and watchful of her uncle—what of her? This meek young woman, who has too many good attributes for a sensation heroine. Well, we have something strange to relate concerning her; she held her peace, and never reproached her Uncle David for duplicity!

She saw Neal at his best, with no invention on his mind, and no home cares; with no morbid restlessness, that suddenly broke bounds and verged on ruin—but the Neal Galbraith that nature intended. He was not of the times before his marriage, or, when that marriage had proved a mockery and a snare; but of the better days, when comfort had been brought him, and he had shown his gratitude by his better life. He was grave, but the smile would steal back to his face at times; he showed his heart when speaking of his child; he was attached to her uncle, almost reverentially attached, as to a man who had saved his life; he was ever kind, gentle, and courteous, and there was in him a nobleness of feeling and expression, that had ripened with his years. He was liberal in his thoughts of others, and a satire shown in his dark estate had wholly left him; there needed only more religion, more faith in that peace which religion can bring, to make him a true hero in her eyes. In a few words, she began to fall quietly in love with Neal Galbraith, and to forget that old hero for whom, by the rule governing contraries, she had once nearly broken her heart. She was ashamed of that liking now, for Tressider had proved himself wicked and unworthy, and she had only thought him weak. There had been a hope to save him—an intense hope that the chance might fall to her lot—but he had gone away into the mist-land, and she might pity him hereafter, nothing more.

"I see it ending like a story-book," Mr. Pike would exclaim to himself in solitary moments, when he would indulge in most irreverent gambols for a stanch Dissenter—"happiness for him and her in the days to come! It's as plain as ever it can be, and," he added in an illogical manner, more befitting Mrs. Higgs than him, "it's getting plainer every day!"

CHAPTER II.

IN THE MIDST OF LIFE.

NEAL GALBRAITH had a faint idea that he was free from any great trouble for ever—he, a widower, scarcely four and twenty yet. All his cares had come early in life, born of an early and unfortunate marriage; and if the path before him was not steeped in sunshine, still it lay far back from the darkness, and he could trace his quiet steps thereon.

He did not expect, yet awhile, at least, any great trial, and he was thunderstruck one day with the tidings that little Carry had been taken suddenly and seriously ill. He bore the news with something of that firmness which had ever resisted the first shock, but his cheek paled very much, and care deepened on his face. Little Carry had been fifteen months with him then, and the spring of the second year was coming round again when this new trouble came round with it.

"It's a sore throat," affirmed Mrs. Higgs, "and I'll nuss her through it, as I nussed her mother once, poor thing! It may turn to fever—just a kind of fever like—but she's young and strong enough to live it down."

"I have always fancied her a little delicate, Mrs. Higgs."

"Get out with your fancies, Mr. Neal!—there never was a child more 'bust!'"

But the 'bust child grew very rapidly worse, and did not fight against the fever so well as could have been wished; the doctors came—the physicians followed them. Neal neglected his share of work at the firm, and took his place at his daughter's bedside, watching and praying, as only mothers watch and pray in most cases.

"I don't think," he said to Pike, who had called late one night with Addie to inquire concerning the child, "that God will deal with me so cruelly as to take my little girl away."

"Hush!—hush, Neal!" cried Mr. Pike—"it may be God's will."

"The doctors don't give me much hope," continued Neal; "but I value not their opinions, and I have confidence in her recovery. Why, she shall recover!"

"I hope she will," said Addie; "but I would not assert my wish so defiantly, Neal, and—and I would be prepared."

"What, you against me, too?" said Neal—"you full of fear for a result that cannot be? Do you honestly believe, you religious people, that I shall be deprived of that one stay? I should go mad, then, at the utter blankness left me!"

"You have borne up against greater trials, Neal," said Pike.

"Never!—never!"

There was an aggravation of that particular trial coming—unforeseen also, as is the nature of most trials that befall us. Mrs. Higgs, ever watchful nurse, untiring, gentle, and ever womanly, succumbed to the fever also, and was taken to her room to be nursed in her turn. What was to be done now?—whence was fresh help to come? He was inconsiderate, even selfish, in his next step; but he could think only of his child in danger, and that carried him away in search of Addie.

"Will you come and nurse my little girl?" he pleaded; "I cannot trust her to the hands of hirelings; her life is precious, and a true sympathy is valuable. It is a great favour that I ask you, but I am sure that you will come."

"I will come, Neal, with all my heart."

Mr. Pike was from home, and on his return was met by Addie's letter, informing him of Neal's request, and of the step taken in consequence.

"She will be of great use—she's a brave little woman, and always was; now, if that child gets better, Neal will as surely love her with all his heart as I do. But—oh! good Heaven! I forgot that!"

Mr. Pike collapsed. The fever might strike Addie in its turn, and take her away from him—that girl whom he loved as Neal loved his daughter. It was very wrong of Neal to expose Addie to this danger; he would start for Streatham, and remonstrate at once on the impolicy of the last step. Mr. Pike started, to find all remonstrances in vain. Addie Merton was in her proper element, and in her best light, as nurse and watcher. That little primness, which belonged to her every-day life, and which rendered her old-fashioned—just a little—disappeared with tasks of greater weight which appertained to every day; and she was an earnest woman, doing her work of charity well and unobtrusively.

"My dear child, you must come home," urged Mr. Pike.

"I am safe here," she added, in a lower tone.

"Safe with fevers blazing about in every direction—goodness gracious!"

"And I am happy here."

"Hap—happy!"

He looked into her face, and she looked down and blushed vividly. Her uncle snatched at both her hands, and their eyes met again.

"Addie, is it true that—that you may like Neal some day?"

"I—I don't know—when Neal likes me, perhaps—which can never be! Don't say any more!"

"But God bless you, Addie! I'll say that. I feel almost happy myself now, and not afraid of fevers in the least!"

He was more nervous the next day—the following more sanguine. It was an obstinate fever that had stolen into the house of Galbraith, and though it attacked no further member of the household, yet it clung to the old servant and the child with a pertinacity that boded ill for both of them. Still hope in recovery never wholly left Neal; he maintained that there would come no fresh calamity to cast him down; and no gentle whispering of the young nurse could render him more reverent.

Possibly the illness of Mrs. Higgs did some good to Neal, and distracted him a little from one morbid thought. It threw his father on his hands more, and it made him interested in the second invalid. He was the messenger passing from one room to the other, and bringing the latest news to the old lady.

"I'm thinking that I'm taking this fever mighty cool, red-hot as it is," Mrs. Higgs said to Neal one day; "and I an old woman, who can't have much strength to bear up against it. But I'm not afraid, Master Neal."

"Why should you be?"

"I mean for the end—the arterwards. I think I've done my duty, as well as I could, 'sidering my letters—I never tried to do any one harm, that I 'members."

"Ever the best of friends—the most faithful and affectionate."

"I used to fret once, because you didn't say too much to me, as though I'd 'fended you. But that was only your great trouble."

"Only that."

"Do you mind, if I should get worse, writing to Johannah?"

"I will write at once, if you have any wish to see her."

"She's old, and I should not like to scare her," said Mrs. Higgs; "but if you'll just write the letter and keep it by you, child."

"I'll go now in search of her, if you wish."

"Not to-day."

The following day Mrs. Higgs was better. The day following that, she said the letter might be sent—not that she was worse, but that Johannah might like to know how ill she had been. The letter was despatched to Shepherd Street, but no Johannah came. Presently the letter was returned through the dead letter office, with an intimation in red ink:

"Gone away—left no address."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Higgs, sitting up in bed in her astonishment and honest indignation; "if that isn't 'common sisterly! I'll get well, just to find her out, and tell her a bit of my mind—see if I don't."

And Mrs. Higgs got rapidly well from that minute.

But the child lingered still on the confines of life and death, and Neal grew more anxious, despite his shallow assertions in his girl's recovery. He began to *look* more anxious, to become lined and sallow—to be nervous of a footfall in the passage, or a strange voice

in the house—even the rustle of a dress approaching, seemed to alarm him as with the coming of an awful truth, to which his sense of fear had given keenness. "But little Carry would not die—he was assured of that," he said!

When he was least assur'd, and he was looking like the old Neal Galbraith, who had had but little faith in anything, the turn came for the better. One day a stronger pulse—for the fever had been fought against and conquered, and it was the exhaustion to which little Carry was likely to succumb—a second day, not quite so strong, perhaps—the third, much stronger than it had been for weeks, and the child awakening to life again with the spring flowers. One evening, when Mrs. Higgs was almost well, and was down stairs pillowed in the drawing-room, with old Mr. Galbraith amusing her in his turn by reading aloud to her the obituary of the *Times* for that day, Addie Merton came in bright and radiant.

Neal looked up, and then held both his hands towards her. He guessed the news that, like his guardian angel, she had brought to him. The doctor's carriage was rolling away from the house, but had not taken hope along with it.

"Out of danger!" cried Addie.

"Didn't I say so?" exclaimed Neal, triumphantly—"and you were all so full of nervous fancies!"

"And you too, Neal," said Addie—"there, never mind your prophecy—come and see Carry; she has been asking the doctor whether you may sit with her awhile."

Mr. Galbraith and Mrs. Higgs, who had expressed their satisfaction also, watched the two pass out of the room. Their eyes met, and both started at the meaning in them.

"God bless me, you don't say so!"

"I never said a word."

"But don't you think——"

"I think that it's more than likely, and that it would be the best thing that could happen, Sir."

"I don't know that; these marriages turn out so strangely—they're not like marriages used to be. I should get very low-spirited if I thought that Neal——"

"Well, I wouldn't think about it," interrupted Mrs. Higgs; "but get on with the *Times*. Is there anybody dead to-day about my age?"

"I'll see, Ma'am."

Mr. Galbraith, senior, put on his spectacles again, and read, without any warning, or without noting the effect on his listener, or being struck with the truth that startled Mrs. Higgs, the following lines:—

"On the 14th inst., at Ilfracombe, North Devon, in the sixty-third year of his age, Josiah Webber, late of Shepherd Street, Southwark, deeply lamented by all who knew him."

"Good gracious!" gasped Mrs. Higgs—"then, while we've been a-coming round, he's been a-going t'other way!"

Death had marched in when least expected, and its shadow fell on Mrs. Higgs, at least.

"I wonder whether he thought of Joe at the last, or what he has done with all his money? He never answered that last letter of mine to Shepherd Street, telling him of the *Edgar* going down—and now he goes down too! No, let's say *up*," she corrected, "though they'll never make an angel of him—he may come in handy somewhere!"

CHAPTER III.

AN OFFER.

WHEN Mrs. Higgs was stronger, she wrote to her sister Johannah a letter of condolence, not unmingled with sisterly upbraiding. She regretted to hear of Mr. Webber's decease, and thought that Johannah would regret to hear in her turn—she might be wrong to assert as much, and it was a matter for 'speculation—that the writer had been laid up many weeks with fever. She alluded cursorily to the ill-health of Mrs. Webber's grandchild—a relative in whom her stolid sister had not deigned to evince the slightest interest, despite the letter Mrs. Higgs had written to her at an earlier period.

Mrs. Webber's answer arrived in due course—a trifle more illegible than her sister's, and taking Mrs. Higgs several days to decipher. It came, hoping that Mrs. Higgs was well—although apprised to the contrary last week—as it left its writer, or rather its dictator—at present. Mrs. Webber had had a hard time of it with her husband before it pleased the Lord to take him, he had been a misery to himself and all about him, and it was a mercy for him, and more especially for all about him, that he was gone at last! She did not think of settling in Devonshire, but of coming back to London again, as soon as her nerves were stronger. Joe and his wife were with her; Mr. Webber had left them a good deal of his money, and screwed *her* down as tightly as he could, which had been Webber's way through life, though she had never murmured, and was not going to begin now. And with her kind love to Mr. Galbraith, the child, and Mrs. Higgs, she was her affectionate sister in grief and wailing, Johannah Webber.

"It's a funny letter!" was Mrs. Higgs's comment on this epistle; "but she always was a *little* funny! I wonder how much poor Webber died worth, and whether Joe'll drink himself to death now? Unless they tie him up, I think he will!"

Meanwhile, Mrs. Higgs had other thoughts besetting her—other incidents, born of the experience of her daily life, to wonder at. She had scarcely entertained a hope of little Carry's recovery; and now the child's progress back—slow and fitful yet—to life, was a something to feel grateful for, and a matter for a little astonishment.

The old faithful servant could watch the child's interest in her new nurse—in the young, patient gentle-hearted woman, whom Neal had constituted watcher there. Mrs. Higgs had heard of Addie Merton very often, but had had few opportunities of meeting her, and studying her character—"taking her in," as she termed it. Addie did not lose *caste* by being "taken in" by Mrs. Higgs; the old woman was no mean judge of what was best for Neal, and she saw in this amiable woman where the solace for him who had stood so long apart from it might be found at last. She was as good a judge of the relative merits of Neal and Addie as Mr. Pike was, and she hoped, within herself, that Neal would marry again, and find a new mother for his child. When the child evinced a love for Addie, and moreover a docility in her hands that was a surprise to all beholders, Mrs. Higgs hoped more than ever that the time would come to wish joy to Neal's new wife in this young woman.

She began to wonder then if matters were progressing; if Neal ever gave a thought to the advantages within his reach, or if Addie—always circumspect, and so great a contrast to poor Carry—ever gave a thought to Neal, or had a wish to cheer his heart and grace his home.

"They keep it quiet enough atwixt them," thought Mrs. Higgs; "and she'll be a-going away next week, at farthest, and then Master Neal will fall into his old ways, or get spoiling that girl again, just as he used to do. And Carry will get strong, and smash the heads off all the ornaments—which I'll thank God to see!"

Little Carry was gaining strength each day when Mrs. Higgs was beset by thoughts akin to those we have recorded; and developing with each day a fear that she should soon be well enough for her new friend to go away from her.

Addie was already paving the way for their separation—feeling some little natural embarrassment at her position there, and troubled now and then by those shrewd, awkward questions in which children will invariably indulge at seasons most inopportune.

"I don't like to hear Addie say she's going to leave me, pa," little Carry once said, when Neal was standing by the mantelpiece, watching child and nurse. "It's very nice to be just ill enough to have her here."

"Hush, Carry!—you must get stronger now, and learn to do without me," said Addie.

"Why?"

"Because I have a home of my own, and a dear good uncle, all alone, who wants to have me back."

"Uncle can come here, and then you can stay, dear Addie! Pa, won't you ask Addie to stay here always, and take care of me?"

Neal started, but recovered his equanimity with tact.

"Addie is always welcome, Carry."

"There!" said Carry, triumphantly.

"Always welcome!—I hope so. You and I, Carry, will have a long talk about this to-morrow. Have you seen my Uncle David to-day?" asked Addie, turning suddenly to Neal.

The conversation was changed, and Neal, after a few remarks, left the room, and went straight to his study, where he turned the key upon his thoughts.

Those thoughts were many, but all tending to one common centre, now. Could he afford to lose this chance—his last chance of happiness with Addie Merton? Was it not better for himself, his child, his home, if the power lay in him to induce her to accept his name? He was not a vain man; he had but little faith in his influence over womankind; his first marriage had proved his want of judgment, and would it be wise to risk a second? After all, was it in his power to win any woman's affection?—had he not been ever too stern and cold a man?

His was an absorbent disposition, and sank within itself; if he had altered much since his first wife's time, was it an alteration for the better? He thought this over, but could not see clearly to the depths of his own character; if he were a more patient, charitable man, it might be for the reason that his way had not been seriously disturbed lately, and that his only care had been for the better health of his daughter. If she had died, he could not tell where his consolation would have lain, or whither his despair might have hurled him in the end.

He reasoned more for Addie Merton's sake than his own. Supposing that Addie might be brought to like him at some future day, she would never be happy with him, he was certain. He would exhaust her patience and gentleness in a very little while, and then the old misgivings! Better to be always alone, with no one to be troubled by his vagaries, and his daughter always at his side to love him. And yet this young woman was ever thoughtful, ever considerate; she seemed to understand him; more than once he had witnessed her facility in turning the best side of difficulties to the light; she was very amiable; to win her love once would be to retain it for ever, a pure and priceless gift that only death could take away. If she had not the impulsiveness of her whom he had lost, if she were graver even than her years warranted, still she was not a dull woman, and he had never known one of such rare intelligence. For him she was too good; her standard of a wife's duties was a high one, and she could only love a husband equal with herself—some even-minded member of her own sect, unselfish and unworldly, with that faith in his God, and that submission to God's

will, which he had never had. In good time she might teach him by the brightness of her own example; but he was not an apt pupil, and why should he dream of foisting upon her his crude, imperfect self! Leave him standing apart there; he was sure that he was best alone!

Having settled this question in his mind, it was strange, even annoying, to Neal to find that it recurred again with all its vexatious arguments. He could not bear the thought of losing that young face from his household, and he shuddered more than once at the dulness of that home when Addie had quitted it, and his child was fretting after her. What a mother for that child, too! bringing little Carry up to love, honour and obey, teaching her what it was never in *his* power to teach, and offering always the example of a virtuous life! Surely, for his child's sake, he should reflect more seriously upon the chances in his favour, and even submit himself to the mortification of a denial of his suit. Now and then he hoped that he might make her happy; he would profit by one lesson in the past, and, at least, do his very best to render her content.

He was not certain if it were really love that he was beginning to entertain for Addie Merton; there were feelings very different in his heart towards her now, but that arose from gratitude for her past services to his child, perhaps; he could not tell. He might be anxious to secure her for his own sake—he thought that that was more than possible—but he missed the romance, the mad impetuosity that had marked his boy's love for Carry Webber. He did not know that romance comes but once in life, and that his heart had sobered wondrously; and he missed the excitement of the chase, the agony of uncertainty, the passionate craving to be loved, that he had had in the old days. It must be for his child's sake that he wished to bind Addie by a promise to him, and that he looked forward to her leaving him with such regret.

When next week was decided upon—next week little Carry would be about the house again, and taking short walks in the sunshine with her nurse—Neal was wretched enough, and when the day was fixed for her departure, he became absent and irritable to a degree that surprised himself, somewhat vain now of his own especial gravity.

They had become good and true friends—as if they had not been true friends all their lives, for that matter—should he let her go away without attempting in some manner to show his gratitude? A few set phrases of acknowledgment for her services and then good-bye, seemed scarcely kind, and gifts of value would look too much like paying her for all past charity.

Going away, too, at that time, augured a more than common separation, unless their followed a right to see her afterwards; he should have no excuse to visit her without his child, from whom night-air was strictly interdicted. Should he ask her to be his wife

at once, or should he bide his time and seek an opportunity more fitting to his hopes? Surely that opportunity would never come if she left his house and he made no sign before she went away; her heart was full of the child, and she had learned to love her charge very dearly, and to feel some sorrow at quitting it. Only yesterday he had heard Addie enjoining his daughter not to forget her when she had gone, but to love her always, as Carry would always be loved by her nurse.

"You'll come back soon, dear Addie?"

"Soon—perhaps."

"Pa will fetch you, if you don't, I know. Me come with him some day and fetch you back for good."

After that there was a strange hush in little Carry's room, and Neal, though he walked still slowly along the landing, heard no more.

The last day, Neal was eccentric in his actions. He did not proceed to business as usual, and since Carry's convalescence he had been regular in his attendance.

Addie expressed a little surprise at his determination.

"I shall see Mr. Pike this evening; he is coming to fetch you home."

"But are you not very busy just now?"

"Very busy," replied Neal, "and I am very selfish to leave the lion's share of the accounts and correspondence to my partner. I will make amends to-morrow."

Late in the morning, he said to Addie suddenly,

"You will be glad to get back?"

This was a difficult question to answer truthfully, or to parry. They were alone together for an instant, and the abruptness of Neal's question startled the maiden. Was she quite truthful in her answer?—this little Dissenter, who never remembered being ashamed of the truth in any phase before?

"Yes," she said, in a lower tone.

"Nursing must be very dull and tedious," said Neal, gloomily—"especially the nursing of a child that is fretful with fever."

"I have not found it so," said Addie. "If I am glad to go away," she added this time, "it is for my uncle's sake—he must have found home a very dull place lately."

"He will be glad to see you back too—yes, he must have been very lonely in that quiet house of yours."

"He is a quiet man, and easily content," said Addie, enthusiastically; "reconciled to my absence, and knowing it to be unavoidable, he would sink himself in his papers, or his microscope, or in his Bible, and study the long nights away. God bless that gentle-hearted, even-tempered man, I have never met his like!"

"A good man—I say, God bless him too, Addie," said Neal, thoughtfully. "I often try to think why he took an interest in me

above the majority of his friends, and in what way I deserved his interest."

Addie blushed.

"And yet," continued Neal, still looking at the ground, and noting no embarrassment in his companion, "what would have become of me without him? If I could even now, in some way, imitate his regular life, and march as calmly and evenly to the end—if by some miracle I could only learn the secret of his great contentment in these latter days!"

"Is it so hard to learn, Neal?"

"It is impossible."

"Without faith—yes. But with it?"

"Still impossible," responded Neal; "faith, if it were attainable, might teach me to hope in hereafter, but would bring me no resignation upon earth."

"You are wrong."

"Unless——"

Mrs. Higgs entered at this juncture, and Neal paused in the eagerness of his argument. Mrs. Higgs was sorry for her advent—as sorry as Neal, perhaps, and hastened to apologise and make matters worse.

"I am terrible vexed I looked in," she said. "I didn't know that you two together were a-talking so 'fortably, and it's only a thimble that I've missed too. I won't be a minute."

But Addie was not disposed to linger there; the spell was broken, and the subject had almost begun to scare her sober senses; there had been such animation in the last words which Neal had addressed to her. She could have listened before Mrs. Higgs's remarks, but not now, with that motherly soul rubbing one hand over the other, and looking at her admiringly. Before the housekeeper had withdrawn, Addie was in her own room, trembling somewhat, and packing up with hasty hands.

Neal went for a stroll in his garden after that interruption, and his daughter seeing him there, came out to join him on that fair spring morning. Neal was ever a good companion to his child, and his dulness, his apathy as it were, perplexed little Carry, after two quiet strolls along the garden paths.

"Are you sorry too, pa?" asked the daughter suddenly.

"Sorry for what?" he rejoined.

"For Addie Merton going away for good?"

"Yes."

"It can't be for good when you are sorry too, can it?"

"For her good—yes."

"Why, pa?"

But pa was not further disposed to respond to these inquiries, and father and daughter entered the house once more.

Later in the day, when the sun had gone down, the evening was

coming on apace, and Mr. Pike was expected every minute, Neal made his second plunge. It was worth the risk of refusal; it was losing his last chance to let her quit him in silence; he had been dull and miserable before her advent there, and with her going would pass from him the hopes that he had fostered.

She was in the drawing-room, waiting and watching for her uncle in the twilight. Neal and his father were approaching it together, when Neal stopped suddenly.

"Will you bring down your portfolio to-night, Sir?" he said precipitately.

"Ye-yes, if you wish it. What's there in it that you would like to see?"

"Oh! half-a-hundred things!"

"I'll send——"

"No, go yourself. Take my advice," said Neal, with some excitement, "and fetch your own plans. It is important."

"Bless me!—something has happened. Mrs. Higgs has lighted the gas with the Galbraith boiler, perhaps. Oh! dear, I'll go at once!"

"Thank you."

The simple old gentleman, who came no nearer to the truth from Neal's demeanour, trotted away. Neal passed into the room, and valuing time at its just worth, darted at once into the subject.

"Addie, I am going to frighten you very much."

"I hope not."

She answered with her characteristic rapidity—answered fearlessly, for all the wavering colour in her cheeks.

"I am going to ask you to come back here presently, in the old post of comforter, to make me happy as well as little Carry—brightening this home, and setting out with me to the new life wherein, God willing, we shall find content. Do you understand me?"

"I—think—I—do."

"To become my wife; to set yourself the task of altering me—an eccentric man, soured by a heavy disappointment, which only you can lighten—to try to love such a man, and make him stronger, better, and more trustful?"

Addie was silent; she turned away her head towards the window, whence the twilight stole, and Neal felt that it was ominous.

"You are right to pause," he said, more mournfully; "it is a great venture on your part, and a gloomy home, as well as a saddened heart, I only offer you. But by-and-by I shall come back, step by step, to my old self, blessed by the example of your cheerfulness."

"I do not pause for that reason, Neal. I would share your life willingly to-morrow, if I were sure that you——"

"That I?" asked Neal, anxiously.

"That you *cared* for me! That this is really love!"

"Would you?" exclaimed Neal, clasping his arms round her.

"Then it is the love of my whole heart!"

"Then why didn't you say so?" cried Addie, bursting into tears, then laughing hysterically, and hiding her head upon his shoulder.

Neal was very happy after that avowal; he did not care to talk of being led to happiness; only a little way from him—a hand's length—and light and life were coming with the day-dawn. They were a quiet, even a commonplace pair of lovers, disinclined to rhapsody; one had outlived romance, and the other had never understood what it was like. One had been sobered by the shock of reality; the other had been ever real and unaffected, regarding things seriously, and brought up seriously; a true-hearted girl, ever on the shady side of the way, but at all times a cheerful woman, deserving of a reward such as she thought was coming to her then.

"What will Mr. Pike say, Addie?" asked Neal. "How surprised he will be!"

"I am afraid not."

"Afraid!"

"I think that he has read our secret, our wishes, more correctly than we dared to read them ourselves, before to-night, Neal."

"How deep these quiet people are!" said Neal. "But surely he never thought that you——"

"He had a vague suspicion," murmured Addie.

"And I so completely in the dark!" was the reply.

"But, Neal," said she suddenly, "you must not believe that I have been in love with you all my life, nursing an ugly secret to my breast, when I had no right to think of you. I loved you," she said saucily, "when you deserved me, not before."

"How conceited we are!" said Neal, laughing.

"I did love—or fancied that I loved—some one before you. Will you forgive that unpleasant confession for its truth's sake?"

"Yes."

Neal was thoughtful for an instant, then said:

"And this rival—this lucky man to gain the first thoughts of your heart—a Dissenting minister, perhaps?"

"No—Walter Tressider."

Neal started away for an instant, crying out, "*That man!*"

"It was a fancy, born from nothing, Neal," said Addie; "he never gave a thought to me, and only offered me a few kind, careless words, when I was a girl. I was filled with a vague sense of my power to turn him from evil, and alter his whole life; and I was sorry, very sorry, when I found out his weakness and unworthiness. Finding that out, Neal, was to shame my woman's fondness, and to prove that, after all, it was half vanity, half pity, that had led my

thoughts towards him for a little while. There, Neal, I would not have a secret from you for the world; and having confessed my wickedness you must tell me that you are cruelly deceived in me, and will not love me any more!"

"Must I!" exclaimed Neal, drawing her to his heart again; "but supposing that my courage fails me at the last?"

"I detest cowardice."

"Are you bold enough to tell me, Addie, that you really love me, then—better than ever you did this weak, handsome villain, who scares me once more with his shadow?"

"Yes, Neal—bold enough for that."

But she was not bold enough to look into his face and say it, though he would have had her meet him with her large dark eyes. But she made no effort to disguise her rejoicing; she had learned to love Neal Galbraith with all her heart, and it was very pleasant to have him at her side, and be assured of his affection. Such a love as theirs made others rejoice too, and there was no one in all the world to sorrow at this engagement, beginning in the bright spring-time.

"Bless my soul, Neal, lad!" exclaimed Mr. Galbraith, entering with his large portfolio before him, "what! sitting in the dark?"

"Yes—but I have company here."

"Eh!—who?"

"Your daughter Addie—the new daughter that is coming to chase the darkness away from us for ever."

"Oh! dear," sighed the old gentleman, dropping his portfolio and strewing the carpet with its contents, "he's at it again!"

CHAPTER IV

THE OLD RIVAL.

MR. GALBRAITH, senior, took time to recover his equanimity; it was not till after Mr. Pike's arrival that the family settled down in its entirety—settled down, as it were, to a deep sense of the peace awaiting them all. The old gentleman was satisfied also, although he had already begun to talk of furnished apartments, with Mrs. Higgs to manage him, when the new wife came home.

"I'm not going to be in anybody's way any more," he said; "I know the young people will find me a nuisance and a bore—and when it is all settled, Mrs. Higgs and I will look about us. I shan't go far away, and knowing Neal to be altered for the best, will make me thankful under every circumstance."

"Well spoken," said Mr. Pike; "we'll all surround this couple with our homes, so that the warmth and brightness here shall radiate to us. But we'll leave them to themselves, as is befitting."

"To be sure, Sir—exactly, as you say. If I had done so with his first wife—a good young woman enough, only a trifle hasty—there wouldn't have been——"

"No, no—exactly," said Mr. Pike, hurriedly; "and now there can't be."

He dismissed the subject of the first wife, as inappropriate for that once—and when a man has just chosen his second, possibly it is an awkward topic of conversation. At all events, it seemed a little embarrassing; so poor Carry was set aside, without a dissentient voice; and there were other hopes, and another wife to think about.

Neal went home with Addie and Pike; the days of escort duty had come again, and the new life had already begun. Strange to *him*, in the beginning, it seemed to believe in his courting days once more—happy days enough, but tinged with a far-off melancholy, as though the remembrance of the first love lingered with him still. It was a staid courtship, although an earnest one; there were no secret meetings at a brother's house, no one in opposition to the marriage—everybody's consent, given with a blessing into the bargain—a wild, impetuous girl, replaced by an equable maiden, who would never utter an angry word, and love on peacefully to the end—whose heart might be broken by unkindness, but would never rebel against its choice. A woman who might pine away beneath the disappointment of her marriage, but would not fly to the unknown would away from it—whose existence would be regulated,

from the beginning to the end, and in the face of every obstacle, by her duty to her husband and her God.

Neal was content — more than content, for he loved Addie Merton more with every day. He would prefer a quiet woman for his wife, and he did not care for a never-ceasing protestation of affection, which would desert him in the time of trial. When the troubles came, she would be at his side, all the stronger for her reserved force; and he could see, looking ahead of him, that peace of mind passing all understanding which she would bring him with her love.

They were to be married in the winter time, when Neal's widowerhood was two years old; Addie would have no earlier day fixed. Neal was satisfied; he had no fear of losing her, of a rival stepping forward and winning so rare a prize unto himself; and it was pleasant, very pleasant to call upon her and her uncle in the weekdays, and to look forward with her to the future life. He would have scarcely forestalled his marriage by a day; his marriage days had been full of discord, and there might lurk some faint suspicion of a something to shadow even that second estate, in which he had more confidence. There was content in the present, and he had known so little of it, that he thought it worth the treasuring.

The summer had come, and they were at Pike's house—Neal, his partner, and Addie—when a visitor was announced.

Pike looked at the card, rubbed his ear with it, looked from Addie to Neal, and coughed.

"It's Walter Tressider," he said at last.

Neal's face darkened, and Addie gave a little jump of dismay for an instant. What did Walter Tressider want upon the scene again, and whose felicity had he come to mar this time?

"Shall I go out to him?—there is not any necessity for meeting him now, Neal," suggested Mr. Pike.

"I should like to see him for a little while," said Neal.

"You'll promise me——" began the other.

"Oh! he is safe in my hands—I bear no malice against him; he has never done me an injury."

"I am glad you think that, for her memory's sake, Neal," said Addie, pressing his hand.

Neal felt her pulse, and looked with a smile into her face again.

"You are not very much disturbed at the old lover's advent?"

"No—not much."

Addie laughed too—and when a woman can laugh unaffectedly at her first love, it is all up for his chances ever again. It had been Addie Merton's duty to love some one else lately, and she had learned to love with all her heart.

Mr. Walter Tressider was announced. He came in, lank of stature, seedy in attire, with a lined face and a weary step—the ghost of the hero that he has been to more than one woman of our

acquaintance. He lost his listless demeanour at the sight of Neal, and paused with his hand hovering for a moment on his lips in nervous fashion. Then his better self—and he had never been more than a weak man, with bad impulses—took him hastily across the room towards Neal, with one hand extended.

"Will you shake hands with me?—me who have inherited my father's power to do harm to you and yours? Will you forgive me all the harm unintentionally done, and the evil of which I have been the cause?"

"You are sorry?"

"I have come a long way to express that sorrow—to attempt to stand better in your estimation, Galbraith. As God's my judge, the last time that I saw your wife was at your house in Fife Street!"

"I have believed this long since—I am glad to have the last witness to my wife's innocence before me. The evil following his wickedness and weakness, I can forgive more readily."

He took Walter Tressider's hand for a fleeting instant—sign of his pardon, not as a pledge of any friendship in the future.

Walter Tressider heaved a sigh of relief, and dropped into the chair that Mr. Pike had placed for him.

"I was a wicked fellow!—a great fool, Galbraith!" he said; "but I did not think my folly would fall on other heads as well as my own. When I heard from Joseph Webber, yesterday, of all the harm that had befallen her and you, I came at once to see you!"

"It is late in the day," said Neal, a little scornfully.

"I have been abroad—I returned last week—I only heard the whole truth yesterday. You remember," turning to Mr. Pike, "that I went away to seek my fortunes?"

"Yes. I hope you found them."

"I lost them, Sir," said Tressider; "I did not succeed in Australia—the world did not take kindly to me there, and instead of a success, it was next door to a failure. It's my luck, I don't complain; I have always been an unfortunate fellow, and I shall keep so to the end. I gave up acting, and went to the diggings; found a nugget and got robbed of it; I came back almost penniless to England again, and have only, by dint of very hard pushing, dropped into a walking-gentleman's place at a second-rate theatre, the lesseeship of which is vested in Joseph Webber. And I believe," he added almost savagely, "that Joe has taken pity upon me, rather than seen his way to making money out of me. I have broken down, and even Joe Webber can see that!"

"Mr. Webber has come into his father's property, I believe?" asked Neal.

"Some of it—I don't know how much—he never told me. No one tells me anything! I'll do my best to push the fortunes of his house, though he must come down with a run if he puts his wife in

every piece; she's too big for a star, Sir, and she can't perform a bit!"

"And his mother—where is she living now?" asked Neal. "A woman isolated like her might have had some little wish to see her grandchild."

"She's in the country somewhere, I believe. I'm not quite certain if she and Joe Webber did not quarrel about buying the theatre—Joe said something of the kind, but I didn't pay much attention. I wanted a good start in the next new piece, and a line to myself in the play-bills!"

And this man had been a hero in his little world, thought Neal—perhaps Addie also. This weak, selfish being, had had the power to wreck a whole life's happiness, and yet without being a principal to the misfortune, or scheming for it. This man, whom Carry had loved before her marriage, and of whom Addie had thought seriously!—verily there must be love-philters still, such as Titania's eyelids were steeped in on that immortal night in Midsummer.

But Walter Tressider was of the new times, and had altered much. Though there were good qualities in him still, they had suffered diminution, and it was only an impulse that had touched his heart and led him to seek Pike out, and through Pike, Neal Galbraith. The old story was a strange one, and appalled him for awhile; he had had the good sense, the manliness, to disavow all share in it, for the sake of the woman whose life he had blasted. He was intensely sorry for Carry and Neal, and eager to be thought free from blame in some respects, if not in all. The confession made, and the forgiveness granted, he became Walter Tressider again—despairing in one instant, sanguine in the next, a poor pitiable fellow, aging wondrously fast, and with his face requiring rouge and pearl-powder, and the full glare of the foot-lights, to look ever its best again.

He was not after awhile even pleasant company; for he diverged to his stage-life, and was only at ease detailing his stage reminiscences, in which the three listeners took no interest. He saw this after awhile, in a flash of clearer inspiration, and rose to go.

"I don't suppose we shall see much of each other," he said sorrowfully; "and yet it's hard to give up all one's friends. I never thought that I should like a fellow as I did you, Galbraith—but then I didn't act straightforwardly, and I lost you. I have been going on my own reckless way for years now, and was not conscious of a good thought until I heard your story yesterday, and then I *did* feel as if I shouldn't like to be set down so bad and black as that made me. You won't think the very worst of me?"

"No."

"You'll find in another good wife your happiness again. In—in Miss Merton, perhaps," he said, detecting quickly enough the smile that passed between the lovers at this juncture.

"Yes," was Neal's frank answer.

"I am very glad to hear that—and of this opportunity to wish you both joy. Though I shall not see anything of you ever again——"

He paused, as though half-expecting a protestation against this assertion, and then went on after meeting no response.

"Still I shall think of you both, and hope that you're always happy. Upon my soul I shall!"

These were Walter Tressider's last words, energetically, almost dramatically delivered—they are the last words which we shall chronicle from him in these pages. Though he played his part in the final scenes of this life's drama, and helped again indirectly to Neal's last trouble, we shall not meet him any more. He passes away, a poor, spiritless being, who had not seriously intended harm to any one, and yet who had done great mischief in his day. Now and then we meet these rapid fellows on the route we are pursuing, and think too lightly of their influence for evil. They are sometimes despicable—but they are always dangerous.

"Could I ever have thought twice of such a man as that!" said Addie Merton, with horror in her looks. "Oh! Neal, dear, what can you think of me?"

"He was a man we have all liked at one time or another—perhaps," he added, drily, "may like again. Give me my answer early in the day, Addie."

"One answer always, Neal."

She flung herself into his arms with a suddenness and impulsiveness than was so like his first wife's, that he drew in his breath for an instant before he folded her in his embrace. Did love render all women impulsive and passionate, even women highly trained to decorum?

"My dear Addie," exclaimed Mr. Pike, with hands uplifted, "this is a trifle too demonstrative. I'm not quite certain that it's etiquette!"

CHAPTER V

WILL NOT SURPRISE THE READER VERY MUCH.

PRIOR to this, little Carry Galbraith had thriven apace. Nature set about its grand reactionary movements after her recovery from the fever, and in a few months no child was stronger or brighter than she. She grew, also, a child of rare beauty, whom people in the streets paused to observe at times, and comment on, whom motherly old ladies, and tottering old gentlemen, with children next their hearts still—those to whom children are dear, are of the true old stock—sought to stay and inveigle into conversation, and were somewhat disappointed by Carry's wilful manners.

For Carry, in full health and high spirits, was a trifle wilful. Her father had helped to spoil her, and Addie's gentle teaching had only been in fugitive moments, and was not yet to exercise its full effect. A loving child at all times and seasons, loving in her very wilfulness, but strangely impulsive, even for a child. Anxious for a gift, impressed by a passing fancy, and almost ungovernable until it had been attained or rendered. In many traits of character so like her mother, that Neal would read therefrom a moral, at times, and strive his best to model her anew, lest in after life there should follow a reflex of that mother's fate.

Neal saw the error that he had committed in his anxiety to win his daughter's love, when there was Addie's love also to give vigour to his latter days; he saw the danger, and tried his best to check it—but it was never in his heart, not even till his dying day, to check the child as well. The attempt was always a failure, for his was a deep unreasonable love, and he could but snatch little Carry to his breast, and try by love to make her good. In this he could succeed, and therefore point to his principle as sound; but wiser people—Mrs. Higgs and Mr. Pike, to wit—shook their heads and remained unconvinced.

It was customary for the nurse to take little Carry for a walk on Streatham Common, when the mornings were fine and dry—walks which invariably resulted in a chase round furze bushes, and on the verge of ponds, till the nurse, flustered and disarranged, succeeded in capturing the fugitive. Once little Carry had nearly been lost—according to the nurse's story—and a second time “as nigh run over, Mrs. Higgs, as ever you could spose a child could be, by a pheayton and pair coming down the hill like good uns!” and Neal had doubled his staff of nurses in consequence, despite Mr. Galbraith's assertion that it was rather extravagant, and altogether unnecessary. Therefore it happened that in the summer time, little

Carry was guarded by two nurses, before whom loomed a prospect of instant dismissal if the child were exposed to danger ever again.

The child was with its nurses, when a young lady, in deep mourning, stopping the *cortège*—a lady who seemed a little agitated in demeanour, for all the thick black veil that hung before her face.

"You will excuse me," she said, almost abruptly, "but you are Mr. Galbraith's nurses?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"I have seen you before with that little girl—what a pretty child she is."

"Yes, Ma'am—it is gen'rally considered so. It's the complexion does it."

"I wonder if she would speak to me?"

The lady stooped and said a few words behind her veil to the round-eyed, staring child, who backed against her nurses' skirts, and finally turned and hid her head therein.

"Speak to the lady, Carry," said the nurse; but Carry stood her ground, and would look round no more.

"You must forgive my stopping you," said the lady, with a voice that had become suddenly very troubled—"I am fond of children, and this is like a little one I lost."

"Oh! indeed, Ma'am."

"Very like! Good-morning."

The lady put something into the hands of the upper nurse, and hastily resumed her progress; the under nurse immediately said "halves," and in her eagerness to see the extent of the *douceur*, tumbled against little Carry, and overturned her into the dust of the roadway, whence Carry began to yell with a forty-horse power falsetto.

Before the nurses could restore the equilibrium of their charge—and, to do justice to them, they betrayed no excitement or indecorous haste in this undertaking—the lady in deep mourning had the little girl in her arms, and was endeavouring very vainly to subdue her agony.

"You should be more careful," said she, in a tremulous, almost passionate voice; "the path is steep here, and she might have hurt herself most seriously."

"Lor! children are always a-tumbling about, Mum!" said the under nurse—"they will *horse* so."

Under-nurse evidently a female of indifferent education, and consequently inclined to be familiar with her betters.

"Let—let—let me go to Mary," sobbed Carry, and the child flew into the arms of the upper nurse, and was caressed, and called "a little dear" in consequence.

The lady went her way again—very slowly, very thoughtfully, and with many backward looks towards them; the nurses resumed

their conversation, when little Carry had become perfectly assured that no considerable damage had occurred.

"A harf-a-crown," said the under-nurse—"well, that's a lady with more money than wits, anyhow."

"She's just lost a little one, and it makes her heart tenderer, you see, Susan," said Mary; "didn't you notice the lots of crape?—and what a silk, surely."

"The oftener she comes this way the better, if she's going to fling harf-crowns about."

"Mrs. Higgs said that people weren't to speak to the child—it was only an excuse to get us into talk."

"Mrs. Higgs be bothered."

The nursemaids streamed on their way, after the custom of nursemaids in general, upper or lower, high class or low. Laughing, criticising, and commenting on all passers-by; glancing askance at the butcher's man dashing by so recklessly in his pony-cart, that there was scarcely time enough to wink at them; and actually nodding at the policeman, rattling past on the other side of the way at the rate of half a mile an hour.

The lady in deep mourning—the woman who had lost a little one, and whose heart was tender—must have been of the world, worldly, if there had been any desire to convey a wish unspoken to see that child again! Half-crowns are capital symptoms of interest, and invaluable mediums—little Carry was conducted that particular round, at that particular time, for many mornings in succession, but the lady did not reappear.

It was three weeks afterwards, when Carry was running wildly about the common, in defiance of all rule, and the nursemaids were sitting on a bench under a tree—one dozing complacently, and the second full of thought concerning her trimming for a bonnet, to be worn surreptitiously with flowers on the first convenient opportunity—that the strange lady came again.

Little Carry had obtained a bough of a tree from some part of the common, and was dragging it after her triumphantly, singing and crowing over her prize, and oblivious to all surroundings, when this woman in black—a colour that always scared Carry by its sombreness—dropped before her, almost on her knees, as from cloud-land.

"Carry!—Carry, dear!" she said, appealingly.

Carry stopped, and stared at the speaker, who had thrown back her veil from a very pale, but very pretty, anxious-looking face—a face that children might take to readily, for the very love there was for them imprinted there. A young face, too, and not unlike the child's, as was natural enough.

"Carry, will you come and speak to me? Just for a little while—for a very little while, my darling!"

"Me mustn't speak to anybody out of doors," said Carry, with becoming dignity, standing with her legs very wide apart, and one

little white gloved hand still clutching the bough of the tree behind her.

"I want you to wear this little locket, Carry—a pretty little locket, to hang round your neck, like pa's big watch. Will you come to me, and let me put it round you?"

"Yes."

Carry was vain of adornments—years ago she had been tempted by that big watch, to which this lady had alluded. She left her bough trailing on the grass, and ran to the stranger, who passed over her neck a something suspended by a frail gold chain, and then held the little girl close to her heart, and put her face against ~~new~~, kissing her very passionately. Carry began to whimper and grow scared.

"Try and think, dear, where you saw me a long while ago—whom you loved best in all the world, then!"

"Me never saw you."

"Oh! do try and think—look me in the face again, and say you haven't quite forgotten me! There, there, don't be frightened, but put your arms round me like this—and let them comfort me!"

But Carry was fairly frightened now; she tore herself away from the stranger's arms, and ran screaming to her nurses. When those valuable adjuncts to a gentleman's establishment were brought to a sense of passing events, they became aware of Carry clinging to their skirts, and the lady in black at a distance from them, kneeling on the grass, with her hands spread before her face.

They ventured to approach her, and the lady rose and drew down her veil.

"I am afraid that I have frightened your little girl," she said. "I wanted to see if she would let me kiss her—she is very shy."

"Sometimes, Ma'am; and sometimes a limb."

"Her father loves her very much?"

"He spoils her, Mum," observed the under nurse; "she can't do wrong, and we can't do right. Just like all the masters who are molly-coddles with their children. I'm sure, at my last place, where the old gent had a young wife——"

"There, that'll do, Susan," said the upper nurse, who understood proprieties, for she had been in real gentlemen's families, and might have married a butler; "the lady don't want quite so much talk. Try and stop that child's screaming, if you can."

"*You* had better see to that," suggested the lady. "Be gentle with her—don't scold her; it was all *my* fault."

Another half-crown, and then the lady walking rapidly away, stopping suddenly to watch them out of sight, returning to the bend of the road, whence she might see them once again, finally dropping on the seat recently vacated by the nursemaids, like a woman struck by sudden illness.

"My God!—utterly forgotten! My own child—my little Carry, whom I loved so much!"

Then ensued sobbing that was scarcely human—deep, intense, and prostrating—such as mothers grieving for their children can only give way to, and live.

And this was a mother who had grieved much, and had had much to grieve for—a woman who had not tortured herself with "fancy troubles."

The reader doubtless has been waiting for her—the astute reader, who does not believe in ships going down with all hands, in novels, but scents the catastrophe when anything like wholesale destruction is hinted at. Well, we did not anticipate startling one good friend by Carry Galbraith's resurrection, and it was not for the sake of a shabby little mystery that we sank that fine screw steamer the *Edgar*, but rather that our characters should develop themselves at their best, or their worst, by those means. The explanation will be evolved in due course, and in Carry's hair-breadth escape there will be nothing to marvel at.

Meanwhile, the child was at home, on her father's knees, full of wonder at the incidents of that eventful morning, and full of admiration at the present that had been given her.

Neal frowned as he held the locket in his hands, and said to Mrs. Higgs:

"How many times have I expressed a wish that strangers should not talk to Carry?"

"But they will stop, some of 'em—those that are fond of children—it's only beggars and gipsies that I can't bear to see 'taking notice.'"

Neal opened the locket, and looked at the fair hair twisted beneath the glass there, and yet was scared not by the truth.

"It's an odd fancy of a childish old woman," said Neal; "it would be better to let the nurses take a different route. Some people would be cruel enough to steal the child; I have read of such cases."

"Bless us!" ejaculated Mrs. Higgs.

Neal twisted the locket in his hands still; suddenly the back flew open at his touch, and the face of the dead wife seemed starting once more to life before him. He held the locket at arm's length, and gasped for breath.

"Look here!" he said at last.

Mrs. Higgs had to find her spectacles, rub the glasses, and fit them on securely, before the opportunity for inspection was arrived at. Neal was still spell-bound when Mrs. Higgs bent over him.

"Why it's—it's Carry's face!"

"Yes."

He rang the bell and demanded the presence of the nurses, who

came, were cross-examined, and could throw only a little light upon the mystery. It might be an old woman, it might be a young one, they never saw her face—she was dressed in deep mourning—she said something about a loss that she had had—a little one, or a little loss, they were not quite certain now—and she frightened the child very much when she put up her veil, and little Carry was doubtful whether the face was old or young, man or woman's. Carry was very anxious to impart information, and so altered the details with each recapitulation, that Neal, Mrs. Higgs, and the nurses, were equally bewildered.

When Neal and Mrs. Higgs had been left together again, the latter solved the mystery.

"Why, it's Johannah—she's come to London to see her grandchild, and time she did, for that matter! And she's given her Carry's likeness, and showed more thought than I should have ever fancied she 'sessed."

"It is probable," said Neal, the truth not for an instant suggesting itself to him. In the life apart from books—the real life to which Neal belonged—it was not likely that the doubt would cross this man.

"When Carry grows to be a woman, she may treasure this," said Mrs. Higgs; "if I was she, I should like to know sometimes what my poor mother's face was like."

"It is natural."

"She may keep it, then?" said Mrs. Higgs, anxiously.

"Yes—let her always wear it, if she will."

CHAPTER VI.

THE CRISIS.

LIFE went on peacefully with the Pikes and Galbraiths; the harmony pervading everything seemed not, at the eleventh hour, likely to be disturbed. Lapped in a false security, they believed that they were people who had outlived storms. All had ended well with Neal Galbraith—all had been well ordered from the first. He could teach himself to think so, sitting patiently in the sunshine of his new life, waiting for a happiness that he had once dreamed would never come to him again.

He had not been patient until then; now he could believe that his had been a wisely ordered trial, which had moulded him anew, and taught him the lesson of endurance. He bore no longer malice in his heart against the dead; for the dead he had ever sorrowed, pitying the errors of the past and pardoning them, seeing clearly now where they had merged in errors of his own, crossed and recrossed until the truth was difficult to solve in the midst of heated passions that had had their day. His had been in the beginning a tragic life; he had chosen a passionate woman for a wife, and then would have made a statue of her; thinking, like a fool, that a few words spoken solemnly before an altar could change a whole life's character! He had expected implicit obedience after a child's promise, and the waking had been bitter, and brought desolation. It was a story to look back upon and profit by; and he was very grateful in his heart that the guilt of a woman's unfaithfulness no longer rested like a brand on Carry's memory. She had not acted like a wife in her love and honour for him—not as Addie would act, for ever, and in the face of every obstacle. But the past was finished like a story-book, and the dead had buried its dead completely—its dead but irreparable wrongs.

Mr. Pike thought so also, and found courage to speak of the first wife occasionally; and though there was always pain in tracing back the reminiscence, Neal would not forbid the subject, or attempt to shun it. Even Addie and Neal would dwell upon poor Carry's story, and both could see that a woman's jealousy had lain at the bottom of many actions that had been hitherto mysterious. Neal had known this long since, but Addie had scarcely suspected it. A woman jealous of a lover she could imagine—why, she could even be jealous of Neal, she thought!—but a wife suspicious of the good faith of him to whom her life was pledged, and whose life was part of hers, that was beyond the belief of a pure-minded girl, until Carry's true history was guessed at.

So the first wife, still living and still desolate, belonged completely to the past, and all past friends pitied her more completely for that consciousness. Knowing this, it was just possible that Carry held her peace, and preferred thus seeking out her child, strangely and mysteriously. Ere we close our chapter, we shall know all the truth.

That truth was very close upon Mr. Pike one evening in July—one summer evening, when he was alone, and Addie and Neal had not returned from their evening walk together. He was sitting at his window, deep in chemicals, all his honest soul absorbed in acids and gases, following out some experiment from the pages of the new number of the magazine he loved. In this self-absorbent way he was always content; this love of study would make amends at a future day for Addie's departure; he did not suppose that he should ever marry now; he had many hobbies to attend to, and was fond of his own company! Violent emotion he had always objected to, and quiet, religious, even-tempered beings constituted the majority of his friends. He would be ever the same to the end, and would die an old bachelor, not because of an early disappointment, or of the scoffer's doubts of that sex which he had always highly estimated, but for the reason that a search for a wife had struck him as a study which would rob him of much valuable time, and unsettle him for deep experiments. If the woman whom he could have loved and revered had come in his way, that would have been a different matter. She has not come yet, however, and David Pike's hair is getting very grey!

Mr. Pike was sitting at his window, then, very intent on his researches, when a lady was announced. No name was given, and he did not pay much heed to the omission.

"Show her in," he said, still counting drops from the phial in his hand; as though a life would escape, should one too many find its way into the glass beneath.

Carry Galbraith came into the room—like a ghost from the other world—and stood at a little distance from him, motionless and waiting, with the veil thrown back from her face. Mr. Pike was conscious of a visitor; he had given one fugitive, almost imploring glance towards her not to interrupt him at that instant, and then counted on, until the end was gained, and he could devote more attention to the stranger.

Then he bowed, apologised, rose to place a seat for the lady, and stopped thunderstruck, as at a ghostly visitant indeed!

"Mrs.—Mrs. Gal—"

He could say no more, but he dropped into a seat himself, and stared horror-stricken at this awful guest.

"It is *you*, then!" he murmured.

"Yes, it is I! I could not stay away longer, and let my staying work more mischief than I deemed it would. I thought that I was acting for the best till now. Now I have come here to *CONFESS*."

"Sit down, please. Let me think!"

Carry Galbraith took the chair that he had indicated a few minutes since, and Mr. Pike sat watching her, doubting even yet the reality of his bewildered senses.

"Back to life like this!" he gasped forth at last; "how was it, and by what miracle?"

"I never stepped on board the *Edgar*, Sir," said Mrs. Galbraith; "I paid my passage money, and then went to bid farewell—even to ask forgiveness—of my father, who would be glad, I thought, to hear of my departure. He had been ill, and had become very weak; he begged me to forget the past, to forget everything, and stay with him, and—I stayed with him to the last."

"Causing much evil by your silence—and doing harm to those who have never wished *you* harm!—I am very sorry!"

"That I am living?" said Carry, quickly; "well, so am I. That is part of my confession!"

"Hush! hush! Mrs. Galbraith! That is not right!"

"I see that wish upon your face, Sir, and I can believe that it is an honest one."

"No, I hope that you do not see that. I am sorry only for your conduct—for that love of secrecy about your actions which has ended before this time in deep humiliation."

"Right, Sir."

"May I ask the reason why you acted with this wild design, forgetting the dangers to which you have exposed so many?"

"I acted for the best in my poor judgment," continued Carry; "it was the accident of winning a father's love that bound me to home-ties again, and made me grateful for the old home's shelter. It struck me that it was better to keep silence for my—Mr. Galbraith's sake, and that he would think more kindly of me, and teach my child to think so also, if he believed that I had gone down with the *Edgar*. My faults then would not affright him so much with their enormity, but be toned down to the level of human sympathy. Sir, I was not wrong."

"Go on."

"And then, Mr. Pike, when he could think more charitably of me, and believe at least that no guilty thoughts had hurled me from his home—only his hard thoughts of *me*—I fancied that I would go abroad—keeping ever away from him, as it is my duty to do, for his honour's sake now, and write to him, telling him the truth."

"If you had only written a few months ago," moaned Pike.

"My father's death had left me rich. When the news came to Ilfracombe, in my aunt's letter, that my child had been dangerously ill, I returned to London to see her, if the chance presented itself—to see her once or twice before I went away. In London, my brother came to me with fresh news—awful news—from Tressider,

the actor, that your niece was going to marry Neal. I heard that news this morning—I am here to-night!”

“Thank God, your coming has followed promptly on the information you received, and it is not too late to repair the terrible error, of which your wickedness has been the cause.”

“Always my wickedness!” said Carry; “well, I can bear reproof pretty well now.”

“You come to stop this marriage?”

“I come to confess all to you, in the first place. I am glad that I have found you here alone. I suppose it *is* right to mar Neal’s last chance?”

“Suppose!” ejaculated Mr. Pike.

“I come to ask your advice, Sir—I have no friends in whom I can implicitly confide—I would make reparation for all, if I only knew the way.”

“What did you think?” asked Mr. Pike—“what could you think?”

“That they need not know of my being alive—either your niece or Mr. Galbraith,” she said in an excited whisper; “that it would be better for her and him to have no knowledge of the truth! It would be very easy to delay the marriage by a few excuses at the last—to postpone it, just for a little while, and then——”

“And then?” echoed Mr. Pike.

“And then I shall be dead in earnest!”

“Great Heaven! Madam, what morbid reasoning is this!”

“I have been told that I cannot live, Sir—that I shall not see another year. With every day I am growing more weak, and it will be only a little while that they need wait. This would save explanation, that will turn him against me again, and would be—I am sure of it—so much the best.”

“No, no, so much the worse for yourself, for all who would plot so horribly against God’s laws. A wild, weak, childish scheme, my poor woman, that the truth would shiver at any moment. It cannot be.”

“Very well,” sighed Carry. “I did not wish it for myself.”

Mr. Pike sat gazing at her, and thinking what a child she was in earnest still. He was not surprised that there had been unhappiness in Neal’s married life, linked to a woman full of vague conceits, and with so poor a knowledge of what was reasonable. A woman whom a man—the right man—might have made a different being, and who had in the face of opposition slowly sunk away from right. Who would do evil that good might come of it, and had been so strangely tutored, that right and wrong were difficult to separate, even from motives utterly unselfish.

“You must tell Mr. Galbraith all the truth, then,” she said, after a long silence.

“At all hazards, the truth.”

"And all the truth of this confession," she added, "that I cannot live, especially. It is a merciful thought to me, and it will give *him* strength to face his disappointment."

"Your life is in your Maker's hands—you must not talk of it as valueless, or think so lightly of death, Madam."

"You are a preacher," she said, a little scornfully. "If you had suffered like me, you would not care much for life."

"Your faults have made your sufferings," replied Mr. Pike.

"Oh! Sir—I do not deny that."

"Will you leave me now, and give me time to prepare Addie and your husband for this shock? I cannot see the best way yet."

"I will leave you."

"And your address?"

"I am living with my mother at Park Road, Stockwell. Possibly you will call, and let me know the result of my visit here, and what Mr. Galbraith thinks of me? Remember, this was no studied effort to strike at him!"

"I will remember. I——" Mr. Pike saw the room-door opening, and ran towards it, with both arms extended—"Back, Addie!—back, Neal!—the dead has risen, and you must not face it yet!"

"Uncle!"

"Where's Neal?—where has Neal gone?"

"Home. What is the matter?"

It was too late. Mr. Pike noted the affrighted glance over his shoulder, and made no further effort to stay his niece's entrance into the room. Addie Merton came in rapidly, eager for the truth that had startled her uncle; and the truth rose at her entrance, and stood confronting her, in the wife, and—the rival!

"Is it—is it you?" cried Addie, glaring into the face, dim in the twilight now; "and how is it?"

"He will tell you"—with an impatient gesture towards Mr. Pike—"when I am gone. It is a story that I have not the strength to tell again."

"Mrs. Galbraith—I demand it!"

Addie was indignant and imperious—a woman roused to a sense of injury that was inevitable, and not to be atoned for. Mr. Pike had not seen his niece like that, and he wrung his hands tightly together, till every joint cracked in them.

"*You* have no right to demand anything of me," said Carry, drawing herself up proudly and defiantly—the woman's instinct repelling back the rival with disdain, even in those latter days, when she stood apart from all of them. "Ask him, I say, again, when I am gone."

"This has been a trick to shame me—your revenge, perhaps!"

"I have not thought of revenge, or seen anything to be revenged for," said Carry, hollowly; "but I will not respond to your demands, Miss Merton. In the old times it might have been my

place to demand back that husband's love you stole from me—now, it is too late!”

“It is false to think that one thought ever crossed my mind in jurious to your peace. That was an error, vile and unjust—that was a disease that preyed upon your mind, and drove you mad!”

“Well, I will believe it, if you wish it,” said Carry, wearily. “I came not here to quarrel with you—rather to promote your happiness. Ask him!” she said again, with an impatient gesture towards the listener once more.

“I—I do not understand this yet. I have been duped by this woman. I cannot see for her one excuse.”

“You love Mr. Galbraith—you were going to marry him!” said Carry.

“I love him. I was going to marry him—to make his after-life, with all my heart and strength, his comfort, and my own.”

“Marry him, then—to-morrow, if you will!” said Carry, impetuously, with that rash vehemence that lingered with her still, sign of the old weakness. “You do not pain me by your bold avowal. But give me comfort as well; ask him to give me back my child, my little girl, that has forgotten its poor mother!”

“Mrs. Galbraith,” urged Pike, “I beg that you will go. This is not calmness now, and will but do more harm—not repair the harm that has been done.”

“I have no wish to stay.”

She drew her mantle round her, and went away, quickly and silently, like the shadow of evil that it seemed she had become. With every action of her life some evil now to cast down others with herself, and merge all in common ruin. In good faith she had stolen into the house of her husband's friends; but she was a woman still, and the woman in her rose at the rival's presence, and resisted.

Mr. Pike returned to the drawing-room, and rang for lights at once, waiting to take the oil-lamp from the servant-maid, and then passing in with it, and turning the key on Addie's sorrow.

Until then, he had not witnessed grief in Addie—not that intensity of grief from which he, vain man, had ever believed she would escape. And now, even this strong, brave girl, who had been the comforter of others, and been ready at all times with the best word, the brightest hope, urging one, and seeing the other as it were by inspiration, was cast down at last.

“Addie!—why, Addie!—you of all women,” he murmured, bending over her.

“Why did you teach me to love him?—show that it was next your heart that I should love him, and lead me on, even out of gratitude to you, until I loved him for himself?”

She was sitting in the chair that Carry had quitted, with her arms upon the back of it, and her face hidden within them.

"I was wrong to interfere, my Addie," said Mr. Pike, soothingly, as though to a child; "all my fault, for which I hope to be forgiven. If I plotted for your happiness, it was in the dark, and knowing nothing of the mystery that this weak woman had wrapped around herself. I thank Heaven that she has come in time to save you!"

"To save me—or to leave me broken-hearted and ashamed!"

"No, no—to grow more strong, chastened by an affliction unforeseen, and to accept with resignation this check upon the vanity of human wishes. Why, you and I together, Addie, will see many happy days—both young, both with the knowledge where peace is to be found, both loving each other, as a father and child should love, to the very end of life!"

"I will be strong, presently—but it is not easy to think of resignation yet."

"No. In the good time, though—it will come to such as you."

"Why should it?"

"Why, Addie—you ask me that!"

"I am no better than other women who have been sure of happiness, and then been baffled. Oh! I did not deserve it—though I was vain of my good works, and did not see how weak and proud I was becoming!"

"You proud!"

"Tell me that woman's motives."

She sat up very defiant still—looking stonily at Fate, as though she repelled its blows, and was strong for resistance to the end.

Mr. Pike told her, briefly and clearly, all that had been related by the wife—the motives that had been alleged, and which there was no right to doubt.

"She loves him still?"

"Yes, there is little doubt of that."

"I will try and forgive her," she said suddenly; "uncle, I think that I can forgive her."

"She has sinned in ignorance—she has striven for good, Addie," said Mr. Pike; "we can pity her as well, I hope."

"She will never think that I need pity," said the rebellious heart again.

"Pity we are above—comfort we will find for ourselves."

He pointed to the Bible lying on the table by the window—a Book that, in that house, was opened very often—and Addie bowed her head. The tears rained on, but they were not so full of bitterness.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER MEETING.

EARLY the next morning, a man—who, at first sight seemed a man in years, he stooped so much, and looked so careworn—knocked at Mr. Galbraith's door. To the woman who opened it—to Mrs. Higgs, who responded to all summonses if she could reach the door in time, and who ejaculated his name in dismay, guessing a new trouble with his looks—he said,

"Where's Neal?"

"I think he's up. I heard him go into his study a little while ago. Oh! what's happened now, Sir?"

"Something that seems scarcely real yet, Mrs. Higgs."

"Bad news, or good?"

"God knows."

"It's not that Miss Merton has been and changed her mind?"

"It is, my good friend, that your niece Carry is alive and well, and living with her mother at Stockwell."

"Heaven be good to us!—who told you?"

"Mrs. Galbraith herself—break the news to Neal's father. I am going up to Neal."

"Oh! dear!—what's to be done about this new contigimy?" said Mrs. Higgs, seating herself on the stairs, for further reflection, the stairs up which the messenger—for good or for evil—had already ascended.

Mrs. Higgs sat there some time, a long, long time, without further sign of the news creating a stir in the house; then she rose to seek out Mr. Galbraith, senior, who was tottering about the garden that day, enjoying country-life, and picking up all the snails he could find for a favourite blackbird of his grandchild.

Mr. Galbraith, senior, was growing old, and his feelings were aging with him somewhat. News that strikes like an arrow at the hearts of the young, often falls like a snow-flake on the old; and it is wisely ordered that it should be so.

"Carry living!—what, Neal's wife?"

"Yes—that poor, wilful girl."

"It's surprising! I wonder what Neal will say? We shan't have to hunt about for lodgings all of a hurry now. Poor Carry! I wonder how she managed to make this new mess of affairs! Oh! here's a fat one!"

And Mr. Galbraith, senior, dropped a very choice and full-sized snail into his garden-pot of collections.

"Well, I never saw *much* better than that," said Mrs. Higgs,

amazed at her master's coolness, and turning away in high dudgeon from him.

She went into the house, and waited at the breakfast table for father and son to take their places there. She enacted the part of humble mistress of the establishment until one more fitting moved her from her high position.

She waited a long time there, till Mr. Galbraith, senior, entered. With the collection off his mind, he was inclined to marvel more at the result of the great discovery, and to hope that Neal would take it coolly. He did not see that there had come any harm to anybody; but there was no telling in what light Neal would regard the matter. Neal was very different from other people!

Neal and Pike were heard descending the stairs together. The street door was opened shortly afterwards, and then Pike went down the steps and along the front garden to the high road. Presently Neal came into the room, very white but very firm.

"My dear young master," began Mrs. Higgs, when he stopped her with a hand stretched out.

"Don't speak of anything that you have heard," he said. "You cannot understand, more than I, the nature of it."

"Don't you believe——"

"I am pressed for time," he said, with that old irritability which they had missed, father and housekeeper, for a long period; "pour me out some tea, as quickly as you can."

The tea was poured out, and remained untasted, until Mrs. Higgs's glance in that direction reminded him of his last request. Then he snatched up the cup, drank the contents, and rose.

"I shall be back presently—in an hour or two, at furthest," he said; he passed from the room, in an instant afterwards from the house.

He went at Mr. Pike's rapid pace, until he was beyond all range of watchers, then he dropped suddenly into a slow progress, and crept, as it were, his way towards the mystery.

He was bewildered, though he had heard all the truth from his partner, and that truth had been conveyed gently, and with a thoughtful man's knowledge of the nature of the person addressed. Neal had feigned not to be quite sure of everything; but he had accepted, almost without a word, the fact that his engagement to Addie was at an end for ever. Mr. Pike had told him that it was best that he should not see her for awhile; not at all now, he added, gloomily; and Neal had nodded his head in assent, muttering that Mr. Pike was right.

He listened, as in a dream, to the recapitulation of the wife's defence, and did not seem to comprehend that part of the subject as clearly as the other. He was not told by Pike—any more than Pike's niece had been told—of the wife's conviction of her early death. The good man shunned that part of the story, thinking it

might be the incoherence of an excited woman, and judging that in any case it was better to keep silence. He had told all but that, and Neal had listened patiently, growing paler, but continuing firm. Mr. Pike had wished at last that he would give way more—that stony firmness was not good for Neal, he fancied.

"I shall understand all this better when I have seen her," muttered Neal. "I shall believe it all."

"Believe it!"

"It is like a fable," he said, coldly; "I don't believe it now—it may be founded upon truth, but a story with so many troubles——"

"Neal—this may be a blessing."

"Prove it."

"You don't repent that your wife is living?"

"Do you ask me to rejoice?"

"You have been saved from a great sin."

"Would it not have been better if she had died in earnest?—this poor woman, who has blighted every life with which she has come in contact?"

"We know not what is best."

"We guess easily enough what is the worst that can befall us."

"No. If you covet that woman's death—no!" cried Pike.

Neal shuddered.

"I do not wish her dead—God forgive me! did I say that?"

"There, you know not what you are saying just now," said Mr. Pike. "Courage!"

They were his last words, and Neal, as he went towards his wife's home—the address of which Mr. Pike had given him—muttered that word "courage" more than once as he proceeded.

Neal Galbraith found no difficulty in discovering Park Road, Stockwell, or the house of Mrs. Webber, late of Shepherd Street. A house by no means shabby in its externals, and with a wealth of flowers in its front garden calculated to bring old Webber from his cemetery to protest against the expenditure.

Neal felt his heart beating nervously as he raised his hand to the knocker; for the first time since their separation, a man in search of his wife! He scarcely knew even then the nature of the motive that had placed him there, or what hopes or fears he wished to verify by the interview he sought. He would be convinced that it was not all a juggle on his senses, before he went back to his home and lonely life again; he had no thought, no wish to take the wife back to his heart. With her living once more, the thoughts that he had had—thoughts that placed his own wrong foremost, and showed his hardness, perhaps—rose from the grave wherein he had believed they had been sunk for ever!

Neal gave his card to the servant, and asked that it might be taken up to Mrs. Webber's daughter. He could not let the name

that he had given her pass his lips at once, but the woman glanced at the card and dropped it in her amazement.

"I beg pardon, Sir—I did not know that it was you, I'm sure!"

She picked up the card and hurried away, shortly afterwards returning to usher Neal into the drawing-room—a large well-furnished room at the back of the house.

He had not sat there long, perplexed and gloomy, regretting that the impulse to be stirring had placed him in a position that might tend to his discomfiture, when the door opened, and Mrs. Webber made her appearance.

"Good-morning to *you*, Sir," she said with emphasis, and with a solemn and impressive curtsy; "it's late in the day to come here, Mr. Galbraith."

"Too late to arrest the further misery of which your daughter has been the cause!"

"Ah! precious miserable you must be to think my gal aint dead!" said Mrs. Webber; "nobody doubts that."

"Where is she?"

"She will be here presently. She isn't the woman she was, and a little discumfrumples her. Your coming aint likely to make her any calmer."

"No."

"You aint come to take her back, I suppose?" she asked anxiously.

Neal shook his head. She had quitted his home of her own free will, and shadowed long years of his life—no, that was the last thought which could ever come to him!

"So much the better," said the old lady; "for you aint the man to feel comfor'ble with at any time, I take it, and you'd turn the sweets of Heaven sour with your black looks. It's my mind, I'm speaking, Mr. Galbraith. I aint got nobody now to make me hold my tongue."

Neal did not pay much heed to her invective; he sat waiting for his wife's appearance, or wishing now that a message might be sent him that she had not strength to bear his presence, and so prayed him to excuse her. He had believed himself a man of greater nerve—able to confront even his dead wife without emotion—and he was fighting hard for a power that should not betray how weak he was. Mrs. Webber's words fell but lightly on his ears; he was conscious of their meaning, but the intensity of their asperity did not affect him. She was a mother, and had her own version of the story; he did not blame her speaking for her child. She was a woman illiterate and vulgar, and the common courtesy of the ignorant he had not expected or required. She was free to abuse him, if it pleased her. She did not know his story, and he did not care to relate it even in self-defence. Let the woman think the worst of him!

Mrs. Webber was not inclined to be impressed by her son-in-law's indifference. She *was* a woman who spoke her mind now, and in her married life she had had no chance of that. In her new estate she was making amends for the undue pressure to which she had been subjected, as she was making amends for the poor life in Shepherd Street. She was a widow, whose weeds were costly, and she mourned in style for the defunct Josiah.

"So much the better," she continued, "that you aint come to take her back. It would be the old game over again in less than no time, and she's quiet here, and only frets a bit at times about her gal. I don't see much to cry about in that, though a gal's a comfort when she's as old as Carry, I must say; and I wouldn't mind coming to see my grandchild when she's bigger, and less tiresome. May I ask what you want here?"

"To see your daughter for an instant," said Neal—"I will not detain her for any length of time."

"She won't be long—she'll get out of it presently."

Mrs. Webber spoke as though Carry were in a bath, and not likely to hurry herself on her husband's account.

"Out of it!" repeated Neal.

"Well, if you must know everything, she's swoounded. She's a great bother with her swooundings now, and I'm sure she could help 'em coming on, if she tried, or have 'em quietly when it wasn't such a trouble to everybody else—in the middle of the night, say! But I've had a good deal to worry me all my life, and I shan't see the end of worry till they lump me a-top of Webber in the simitary! He would be brought to London—he left it in his will so—I never met with a man who wanted so much waiting on!"

The mention of Mr. Webber's will suddenly appeared to sharpen the faculties of Mr. Webber's relict. She gave a tug to her widow's cap, settled it more firmly on her head, and then drew her chair, by rapid little jerks, closer to our hero.

"I think I just begin to see why you've come here, young Sir," she said, in that manner generally designated "knowing," "and it'll make matters shorter if I undeceive you. You want your wife's money now, p'raps?"

"Madam!" said Neal, startled from his apathy by this allusion.

"It'd be a fine thing to throw away on them cold blaster dodges which I've heard on, but you can't," she said, triumphantly; "Webber was too cute to be taken in by you. It's all settled on herself—tied up in a tangle, so that even she can't make it over, and after her death it goes to Joe, who'll have about spent his own by that time in theyaters. There isn't a penny to be gained by coming here, and upsetting house and home in this fashion."

"Is it worth while saying that I have not thought of Mr. Webber's money?" said Neal, more listlessly.

"It isn't much. I shan't believe you, for one; she may, if you tell her, and if you think it's worth the telling."

"I am not here to speak of money, or to defend the honesty of my intentions," said Neal, betraying a little irritability beneath the constant attacks of this old woman.

"You can tell Mrs. Higgs—and whatever made her throw herself away in slaving all her life for two March hares, I never shall make out!—that I'm her sister still, and she might think so now and then, and come and see me. I don't say it's her gratitude to do so, or her duty, mind; and if she thinks it right to slight me, let her."

Mrs. Webber, having started a fresh subject, would have expatiated at some length on her sister's ill-treatment of her, had not the handle of the door turned, and given warning of the wife's arrival. There was some whispering outside, a voice suggesting further help, and another—*hers*—refusing it, and then Mrs. Galbraith came slowly into the room, and turned towards the visitor.

Neal rose instinctively, and slightly bowed his head—the wife imitating his movement, and then sinking into a chair by the centre table, on which she rested a thin white hand.

It was a strange meeting after that wild night at Nottingham, when, moved by a passionate fear, she had flung herself at his feet; this was a woman whom he had never seen before—a very calm, shadowy-looking woman whose face was grave and solemn, and about whom rested a dignity that awed the man before her. What struggle there had been to look like that, and face him with that coldness, only Carry Galbraith knew.

"I did not expect the honour of this visit," she said at last.

"Madam, it was not to be expected," said Neal, in the same low, repressed tones which she had assumed; "it is scarcely to be accounted for. This morning an old friend, on whom you called last night, apprised me of the news with which you startled him."

"Bad news enough," commented Carry; "but not to be avoided. He told you my reasons for the act?"

"All of them."

"You will believe—you will try and believe, perhaps," she corrected, "that there was no malice in them? It did not strike me," she went on after a pause, that you would so quickly resolve upon bettering your state, or I would not have added by my actions to your discomfiture."

"I have not come for your excuses—or your satire, Mrs. Galbraith," said Neal, after a pause on his part.

"Sir, I am not inclined to be satirical—you mistake me, even now."

"It is possible."

He was silent again for awhile, and neither mother nor daughter broke the stillness in that room. Once Mrs. Webber made a movement as though to speak, but Carry checked her with an uplifted hand, and it was Neal whose voice reverberated first there.

"I came to be quite certain that I was not the dupe of other people's senses," said Neal; "convinced thus, I have only to withdraw. Meetings between you and me must be always painful, and to prolong them is to add torture to us both."

"One moment."

He had moved a step towards the door, when Carry's quick words—the words more natural to her manner—arrested his retirement.

"You are sorry that I live?—it has come even to that."

"Pardon me—that is an injustice—the last of a long series."

"I am—very glad—to hear that."

Neal would have withdrawn now, but she added—

"Another moment, Sir. This is more important," she said; "we may never meet again—in all probability you and I will never look into each other's face again, and I must speak to you."

"Not of the past—it is forgiven, if you will—but it is sealed down."

"The past!" she cried passionately; "we have both done with it."

"What subject, then——" began Neal.

"The future, Mr. Galbraith—*my* future. It is not a long one—it must not be wholly dark—I have your promise to see my little girl."

"To see her—well?"

"It was part of our compact when I broke my heart and gave her up," said the wife; "it must not be cancelled in bad faith. That child, Sir, is my heart's blood, and you have no more right to keep her from me than to take my life."

"You will consider the harm that may follow this?"

"The good to me—and I am selfish in this matter. The good to my daughter, to whom I can offer a mother's love, and teach her by the story of a mother's faults the duties of her future. I will entreat you, humbly and earnestly, to keep your word with me."

"If you claim its fulfilment, it must be so."

"I claim it, then," she said; "I would have my daughter know her mother again—and I will try—oh! so hard—to win that old love back once more. Mr. Galbraith," she said rising, "I thank you gratefully for this—I will be ever grateful for a kindness that shall do no harm to you, and shall offer for a little while to me a glimpse of heaven."

Neal's heart thrilled at this woman's thanks—thanks for her share of her own child. That heart was troubled, too, but he could not sift to the bottom of the many thoughts there. In the midst of them, there was a jealous fear that his daughter would love him less after she had met her mother—and that with his consent, he made one step back, as it were, towards that dreadful past, against all allusion to which she had protested that day.

It was a meeting that had ended in a manner unforeseen, and

the result was yet to come. In her impulse, in her excess of gratitude—that mother's pleasure, which forgot all else, and sank the errors of her life away—she held her hand towards her husband, but he did not take it. It was scarcely apparent whether he had detected the outstretched hand or not; he had bowed slightly again, and moved towards the door, and Carry's arm had fallen very quickly to her side.

Between them ever that one false step, which the husband would never forgive—which it was his duty to society not to pardon! He had spoken of forgiveness to her, but it was in cold, hard tones, such as could never have escaped the lips of mercy; he bore his wrong nearest his proud heart still, as the Spartan bore his fox. It would gnaw him to the death, but he would cherish it—there seemed no power on earth, or in heaven, to change this man of iron.

Neal went from the room, Mrs. Webber following him to the door.

"The child shall be brought here now and then by Mrs. Higgs," he said.

"As often as you can let her come, p'raps?"

"I said now and then!"

"I don't want her for myself—I'm not fond of children," said Mrs. Webber; "but it would make her happy enough, and not hurt you, that I can see."

Neal turned upon her almost fiercely.

"The child must not be spoiled," he said; "a word must not be said against me, or she comes no more. Take my warning to your daughter, and remember that I shall be ever watchful!"

He went away homewards, at the same slow, thoughtful pace, thinking of the meeting with his wife, and whether much harm would come of it. The shadow had lain too long and heavily upon him to believe in any good result.

BOOK VII.

LOOKING FORWARD.

CHAPTER I.

MAMMA.

It had been the one wish of Mr. Pike that Neal should not see his niece again, and Neal had assented to that wish. For a little while—a year or two even—Mr. Pike had determined that they should not meet. Addie was strong—very strong, and able to bear up against the shock, and see clearly how it had all happened for the best!—but there would be painful reminiscences conjured up by the meeting of two whose loves had been innocently dishonest. Mr. Pike thought this; Neal did not.

Neal believed that he could take his place in their midst again, and be even the brother that he was before the courting days. With Carry's resurrection there came back all his past thoughts, and Addie Merton seemed very far away then—a something that he had dreamed about, but which had left his heart on waking. He could love Addie as a sister, and welcome her at his house with her uncle unmoved; talk with her even about Carry, and Carry's child, and follow her advice concerning a new care to which the meetings between the mother and daughter had given birth. He protested all this, and Mr. Pike might have believed his protestations, but he did not put them to the test.

Addie was not fretting at the dispersion of her love-thoughts; she was gathering strength slowly, and, to all outward seeming, was becoming the woman she had ever been—a trifle graver, at times, as are people who have escaped a danger. Mr. Pike had had enough of experiments, and Neal and Addie had better keep apart, he considered. They were both strong, and both young, and neither, thank Heaven, was inclined to give way.

For little Carry Galbraith there began a life of oscillation between Streatham and Stockwell—a new life at which she flinched at first, but loved very speedily. Mrs. Higgs was her escort to the mother's house, bringing happiness and joy to the niece whom she had not seen for many years, and whom to see now, so frail and delicate, was to be shocked at very much.

"My poor Carry!—my poor, wilful gal! Oh! if I could have altered all this, ever so long ago."

"Never mind, now—what does it matter?" Carry would say, anxious to dismiss the subject; "it appertains to 'long ago,' and here's my child to comfort me for all the by-gones!"

She only needed the love of little Carry to make her life bright,

the mother said, and watching her with the child, was for Mrs. Webber and the aunt to believe in her. To all the rest of her life resigned enough, and verging, at the last, upon contentment. It did not take long for little Carry to call the lady "Mother," or for the mother to win back the daughter's love. The child had had a fitful gleam of what a woman's love was like when Addie Merton nursed her—but what a mother's love resembled, she had forgotten. At that time it was only to be realised in its entirety; and here was a mother whom she went to see, who had no other thought in life but to love her—to hold her to her heart, and lavish upon her all its wealth!

They were golden moments, when mother and child were together—even stout-hearted Mrs. Higgs and callous Mrs. Webber felt the holiness of them, and intruded not. Whenever Carry was brought to Stockwell, it was understood that it was for the mother alone she came, and that no interference were to be attempted between them. The mother for the child, and the child for the mother, until it was time for little Carry to go home, and tell her father what a holiday it had been with poor mamma!"

The father listened carefully to all the details of the meeting, strangely interested in the minor incidents of his child's life—strangely watchful and even suspicious. But the girl loved her father none the less, he thought; and no one at that house at Stockwell had said one word against him *yet*! So the time went on, and once again people were talking of the early winter—that was to be hard and severe that year, prophets said.

In the winter little Carry was taken home before the night set in, and the mother sorrowed for the difference it made. The mother was growing weaker, and the summer time, she thought, would never come for her again; the long summer days, when little Carry was not expected home till nine o'clock! Once the mother suggested to Mrs. Higgs that the child might remain a day or two; suggested timidly the question, balked at once by her aunt's sorrowful dissent.

"I have already had my orders, Carry," said Mrs. Higgs.

"But it is raining?"

"I am to hire a fly whenever the rains come, and, under any 'cumstances, the child must go."

"What does Mr. Galbraith fear?"

"I can't say—he never tells me. But he always warns me that the gal must come back."

"Very well, then."

Carry seldom asked questions of her aunt, or mentioned Neal's name to her. It was understood that the subject was forbidden, and only pain could ensue from it. Forbidden in that house the name of Neal, for Carry's sake, as all mention of the wife's name was avoided in the husband's.

But Carry asked questions of her child—many questions, to which the child innocently responded. Carry was interested in that unknown home where Neal was, in Neal's life, and in the friends he had made. Concerning the friends she was very curious, and there lingered the old failing around her better life.

"You see Miss Merton now and then, my darling?" she asked one day when they were together, the table heaped with toys—many of them rare and costly—and little Carry perched on a chair with her treasures before her.

"Not now."

"Never?"

"Oh! never now—I don't know why, mamma—she was very fond of me."

"She said so, perhaps."

"And was to have been my mamma Addie, pa said once. Why, how was that?"

"When you are a big woman, pa will tell you. You wouldn't understand now."

"There are many things that I should like to know about you and papa," said the child thoughtfully.

"Some day—some day. And were you fond of Addie Merton?"

"Oh! yes."

"Not so fond of her as of—papa?"

"Not quite."

"Or—me?" she asked with a strong effort.

"Oh! no, no—no one like my dear mamma."

The mother's arms were round her, and the tears were falling heavily; this was something to be grateful for at last, and yet there were times when these meetings seemed but to show her loneliness in a graver and more awful light.

From mother and father in their separate homes this cross-questioning went on for a time, and Neal saw the elements of danger in it. He did not speak of them, and, after a while, he forebore on his part to ask the child what had been said to her. He was content to think that not a word was ever spoken against him, and if his daughter loved him just as well, why, the mother need not upbraid him for his promise-breaking. But let the child evince a preference for *her*, or show, by some new trait of character, a difference however small, and he must care no more for promises. He was still very watchful of results, for his soul was in his daughter's welfare, and in the future he should have only her to live for.

Now and then a question escaped him in spite of himself. In the winter time he said to little Carry,

"Are there ever any visitors to your mamma's house?"

"A gentleman sometimes."

Neal was astonished at his own spasm, but went on.

"What kind of gentleman?"

"A funny man, who makes me laugh, and tells me that he is my Uncle Joe. I like him—rather," she added reflectively.

"No one else?"

"No one. Mamma could not see them—people worry her, she says."

"Indeed!" remarked Neal.

"I shall be glad when summer comes, papa."

"Why?"

"Ma will be stronger, she tells me. We're both waiting for the summer."

"It will come before we are prepared for it, Carry. You," pulling her curls, "must not be in a hurry to run through life, my girl. In the winter you are more with me, remember."

"Yes," said the child.

Neal was waiting for the offence against his pride then, but it came not, and there was no excuse to strike for his own share of affection.

That night the task lay before him of warding off a question which had more than once risen to little Carry's lips, and was always ready to be fenced with. A question that came suddenly to father and to mother at times, stabbing each heart in turn—the natural inquiry why two she loved so dearly could not be together like other pa's and ma's that had been pointed out to her.

"It is for the best, Carry," Neal would say hastily; "and your ma has a mamma of her own to take care of, and I a father."

Neal would hurry away after so sorry an explanation, and Carry would brood upon the answer, and try to reconcile it with the facts about her, and bide her time to nonplus Mrs. Higgs or grandpapa.

If it had not been for Neal's watchfulness of his child's love, the anxiety with which he waited for one sign—and which must come inevitably from a child with a doting mother—this passing of little Carry from house to house might have softened a harder heart than Neal's, and led to a something more than sympathy. His thoughts were difficult to understand and reconcile with each other; even to him there came a wish sometimes that he could consider his wife justified in coming back to him; and then a thought that she was still unwise and revengeful, nursing the first foolish idea, with all the uncharitableness of a mind distorted by one fallacy. Then he would shun all thought and doubt his own wishes, their depth and value—and from the past echoed some bitter words which he had treasured up, and which, forgetting not, would ever sting him. Yes, this man was terribly unforgiving—he had marked out his own path, and he would follow it to the end.

What were the mother's thoughts at this period were never whispered to one confidant. Judging Neal's character by one retrospect, seeing her folly clearly and repenting of it, still she had no hope. If she were sorry for Neal's wasted life, there was no

atonement on her side that he would think befitting or sufficient, and it was beyond her strength to offer any. All the pardon of which that stern man thought his wife deserving, had been extended when the rare privilege of seeing her own child was granted her.

"Do you think papa is happy?" she asked little Carry once, carried away by an impulse to speak of him again.

"Happy?—how?" said the child.

"Happy as you are."

"Oh! no. When he plays with me, he smiles a little—not always. And he is so fond of thinking—sitting like this, mamma—with his forehead all rucked up—I wish that I could show you how."

"I can guess, dear."

"Grandpa, or Mrs. Higgs, when they see him looking like that, send me to talk to him."

"They are very kind," said the mother with a sigh.

Then the toys were brought out, and the deeper subject was dismissed.

CHAPTER II.

PEACE-MAKERS.

CARRY GALBRAITH was to be troubled by an unexpected visitor before the depth of winter set in. No less a visitor than Mr. David Pike, who sent in his card, and requested the favour of a few minutes conference.

Carry had visitors already that night—friends that had not left her; the old friends who had been kindest to her in her desolation for her own sake—Joe Webber and his gigantic wife. For the first time we meet these latter almost in prosperous circumstances—or rather at a time before the adverse elements common to all Joe's undertakings had set fairly in. Joe was looking well and getting stout, and to see Joe in that condition, in a black velvet waistcoat, loaded with twelve ounces of gold chain—Joe clean, fresh shaven, and unfuddled, was a sight worth waiting all these chapters for.

Mrs. Webber was thinner than ever, with anxiety concerning the new business, the properties, the company, and the receipts; but she wore a black velvet stomacher also, and looked queenly, if slim. The family circle of the Webbers was complete, and Mr. Pike was introduced into its midst, with a want of ceremony that embarrassed him for a moment.

"I beg pardon, Mrs. Galbraith," he said; "I was not aware that you had visitors. I was anxious to see if you were well, and have taken the liberty of calling upon you for that purpose."

"I am as well as I ever expect to be," she said, somewhat coldly; "I hope that you are in not very great haste, Mr. Pike."

She was half-reclining on a sofa near the fire, pillowed carefully, and looking but the shadow of Neal's wife. In the twilight, when she had called upon him in her walking-dress, the change in her had not struck him so acutely.

"In haste—for what?" asked Mr. Pike, innocently.

"For Miss Merton's marriage."

David Pike crimsoned to the roots of his hair, and said with more warmth than he was accustomed in excited moments to exhibit—

"I have never thought of that since our meeting, Mrs. Galbraith. You do me an injustice. But then," with that naive conceit that did not set ill upon him, for it was exhibited so rarely, "you do not know me."

"I am harsh—I beg your pardon," said Mrs. Galbraith; "but invalids are licensed to be querulous. You and I were good friends in our day, Sir—and you have done me more than one good turn. No—I do not think that *you* would rejoice at my death much."

"No one of my acquaintance would, I am assured. No one whom I know is even aware of your delicate state of health."

"May I ask why you are here to-night?"

"For the reason that we *were* good friends once—and that you are a woman who has suffered much."

"And is still suffering!"

"I am sorry to hear that. I had come with a hope to find you resigned—patient—forgiving. You will pardon me, even to intrude upon you with a few good words, and attempt in my way some little consolation."

It was noticed that he carried a small Bible in his hand, and that there were several tracts peeping out of the pockets of his coat.

"We have plenty of people who deal in consolation," observed Mrs. Webber, "without coming to you for it. And if my gal is to die—which I don't think, for weak chests isn't in the family—it's as well not to aggrivate her with more preaching than comes in from the corner-place. It's out of your way, and out of our line."

"I have many good friends, Mr. Pike," said Carry, more courteously; "and I am not neglectful of my Bible. Still, for all good wishes, let me thank you."

"I had come, too, to ask if you would allow a lady of whom you have spoken harshly, to see you presently. She is very anxious."

Carry's brow lowered, and Pike saw it.

"Oh! Mrs. Galbraith, I think it is unjust to bear an ill-feeling in your heart against the best of girls."

"I have no reason to remember her gratefully," said Carry; "I would rather not see her any more."

"It is her wish."

"Not yours?"

"And mine, too."

"Why does she wish to see *me*?" asked Carry; "what good to her or me can ensue from such an interview?"

"I hope a little good."

"Let her come, if she will," said Carry impatiently. "I think, upon consideration," she added more thoughtfully, "that I should like to say a few words to her."

Mr. Pike hastened to withdraw before Carry's resolution should waver; with his love of tract-distributing, he dropped a new exordium, by Mr. Hedger, in the hall, and then hurried away. He was half a mile from the house when some one, panting very much, touched him on the shoulder.

"Excuse me, Sir," said Joseph Webber, for it was he who had followed Mr. Pike, "it's a pull to fetch up to you, when you've made up your mind to step out—especially as I'm stouter than I used to be. But I want to talk to you about my sister Carry."

"I am at your service."

Joe Webber passed his arm confidentially through Mr. Pike's, and the two walked on together in this amicable conjunction. People fond of gossip—prying people, always on the alert—made note of this circumstance, and tried to damage Mr. Pike's character by asserting that it was *rather* out of place for an elder of a chapel—and Mr. Pike was an elder now—to be walking about the streets arm-in-arm with the lessee of a theatre; but the fact, though conclusive, never led Mr. Pike to make out his defence.

"You're the very chap I've been wanting to get hold of," Joseph Webber said; "for you know that Galbraith fellow best of all of us; and I've a good idea about him and Carry."

"Eh?"

"To bring them together, just as a wind-up, like the last scene in a melo-drama!"

"I don't know anything about the last scenes in melo-dramas, Sir."

"I wish a few more of you chaps did—it would make business brisker."

"To bring Neal and his wife together! Dear me! it is very singular that *that* idea should have struck you too!"

"It struck me all of a heap, I can tell you!"

Mr. Pike did not understand that particular form of striking, but he nodded his head, as though he did.

"I never was a very feeling cove," said Joe—"I never wanted to be, or the preponderance of kicks over halfpence would have settled me long since. I've been a rough one, and I've had to rough it in the roughest times, caring for nobody but myself. But I have never roughed it in all my blessed life as Carry has."

"Poor woman!"

"Poor devil!" added Joe, to Mr. Pike's horror. "Why, I couldn't bear to see her fighting for life, she and her child; and trying to be too proud to *show* what she felt, and always moaning out how wrong she had been to run away."

"Sorry, then?"

"She has been sorry enough; and it was only I who could keep her from going mad, by talking of the times a-coming. Well, here they are—bright ones in their way—though I'm not particularly dazzled myself."

"I have thought of this also, Mr. Webber."

"Joe's more sociable, Sir. The other thing don't fit."

"I have thought of this, Joe," said Pike; "but the mists are heavy, and I don't see my way through them."

"Is that man as obstinate as ever, then?—after all this time, now he's collared the child, too!"

"He has never spoken of the subject—and I, his best friend, have scarcely thought it prudent to introduce it."

"Neither would I," said Joe, "if she could have a bit of happiness without him; but she can't. Neither more would I now, if there was just a chance of her living to get old, of her living to get over it, or of anything but her slipping away from us. But when it comes to dying, and she has never done him any harm—for the real harm fell to her share——"

"Justly," added Pike, "for he loved her very dearly."

"Then I think that it might be better for him and her to make it up. At all events, for him to see her, and not to let her go out of the world thinking that he never will forgive her. Damme, Sir! if that's a chapel trick, I'm proud of being Church of England!"

"Are you in the habit of swearing so much as this?" asked Mr. Pike, more shocked than ever.

"Not quite so much, perhaps."

"I'll send you round a paper in the morning that will astonish you."

"Thankee!" said Joe; "but let us settle this other affair overnight, if we can. Here's a place where we can have a glass together, and talk it over quietly. Come on, Sir!"

"No!—oh, no, thank you! I don't see how it can be settled, Mr. Webber," said Pike, increasing his pace past the "place" indicated. "Neither husband nor wife has ever expressed a wish to set aside the past—for the husband I can answer."

"Words are nothing—Carry has said nothing," said Joe; "but I think I see what is best, and if you won't make the effort, I will."

"You?"

"I don't see why not, Sir," said Joe, doggedly. "Carry has

always stuck by me, and I shall keep to her, now she hasn't the chance to help herself. I shall speak my mind to Galbraith."

"I would certainly advise you not to do that."

"I'm not afraid of him, Mr. Pike, great gun as he is!" said Joe. "He has been too upright to please anyone but himself—and if he has done that, it's a wonder! I gave him a lift once, and now it is his place to make me compensation."

"A lift?"

"Well, he thought so at that time, although things have taken a different complexion," said Joe. "I stood his friend when he was anxious to marry Carry, and I gave him the run of my premises when Carry was living with me, and I helped him to get his license, and assisted at his marriage, giving a family countenance to the whole affair?"

"Ahem! I don't think that I would mention those obligations under which Mr. Galbraith labours."

"It has been an unlucky marriage—but not all her fault, Sir."

"It's not worth arguing about."

"You would keep him away from Carry, perhaps?"

"No. I think it would be best that they should meet again."

"And you'll try and bring that about?"

"I will."

"Then I need not interfere. You'll do your best for the girl, now, won't you?"

"I certainly will."

"You're a good sort!" said Joe, confidently; "and if I ever can be of service to you, you've only to say so."

"Thank you."

"You go to theatres *sometimes*, perhaps?"

"Theatres!—Never!"

"*Never!* What, never see a good play? Not a play with such first-rate talent in it that there's a mob outside the house before the doors open?"

Mr. Pike responded in the negative.

"It's a pity in a man of your years!" said Joe, with feeling. "It would have done you more good than you fancy. I asked the question, because your name is on the free-list of my establishment from this very night!"

"My dear Sir, I——"

"A free list, which however entirely suspended, the public press excepted, shall not be closed against the name of Pike!"

"But I never, on any account——"

"To oblige me, perhaps you'll come and see the Investment as *Helen Macgregor*, who was naturally tall, Sir, and, indeed, formidable. And if you won't come—why, there are plenty of your friends will, and they have only to mention your name. It's not much of a return," said Joe, after a little reflection, "but it's all I

can do, at present, for your interest in Carry, for which I *do* thank you, with all the heart that a great deal of 'knocking about' has left me."

He shook hands with Pike very warmly, hoping again that Pike would do his best to bring about a meeting, and then strutted away to his theatre, to count the numbers in "the house."

Mr. Pike went home to relate the result of his mission to Addie—to think, long after that, of the best means to bring about a meeting, even a fugitive kind of reconciliation. If it were a parting between them—a parting for ever!—still Neal might be thankful to look back upon it, in the days to come. But he did not know how terribly hard Neal was to move—or what had happened to Neal in the interim to balk the best intentions.

Neal was not at business the next day, and Mr. Pike went in search of him in the evening. He found his partner shut up in his study, writing busily.

Neal laid aside his pen to welcome his friend.

"I was writing to you. This is a coincidence," he said.

"Writing to me, Neal? Why, should I not have seen you to-morrow?"

"I shall be busy to-morrow, preparing for a journey. I have not had much change in my life or seen much society of late years—I begin to awaken to the consciousness of growing old-fashioned."

"You were writing to me?"

"To tell you this—to let you know that I leave to-morrow night at twelve for the Continent. To ask you to spare me for one month, or two—three even, if the humours suit me—and not to consider me too selfish in abandoning you at this busy time."

"I can always spare you, Neal," said Pike, thoughtfully—"spare you more heartily when I feel assured that you are going for your good. But this is a very sudden resolution—and candidly I don't understand it."

"There is no mystery, old friend. I really require change of scene; I have been brooding too much, and it has affected my health."

"You are unsettled again?"

"No. To everything before me I am resigned."

"And to the past—and all the troubles in it—resigned also?"

"Yes, I hope so. That is part of my duty."

"You go alone?"

Neal did not answer, and Mr. Pike repeated his question.

"Alone? yes—unless you call my little Carry company."

"What!—you take the child?"

"Surely I cannot leave her here. Would you advise me?"

"For her mother's sake—yes."

Neal shook his head.

"No," he said at last.

"My dear Neal," urged his partner, "have you seriously considered this step?"

"I have considered every step, and where it leads. I have made up my mind."

"Why, even for your own sake——"

"Pardon me, but for my child's sake I am going."

"Are you sure?"

"I see a difference in her—I have been waiting for it, and it has come at last. The child is altering, has been too long at home, and has had too much of her own way lately. I have been recommended a foreign school for her."

"At her age?—oh! Neal!"

"She is not too young—if school disagrees with her, she brought back at once. But it is an experiment worth trying; conflicting elements spoil her for ever."

"May I ask what you mean, Neal, by 'conflicting elements'?"

"They are easily guessed at."

"The father's love—and the mother's?"

"Yes."

Mr. Pike had been waiting for this opportunity to speak, and he seized it on the instant. Seized it, in that face of despair, which spoke of Neal's determination to depart. He had not much hope of any good result, but he would do his duty, fearing no rebuff. Neal would hear more from him than from any one else in the world.

"They should not be opposed—they should not make this child one more harsh memory between the parents. Surely enough of opposition, cruel and unvarying, *has* ensued."

"Surely!" answered Neal.

"Why deprive the mother of her child, then?"

"Because that child is *my* happiness—all that is left me in the present or future. Because, despite every effort of my own, I am loved second-best, and the mother comes between me and all that I hold dear. I will not have that!"

Neal's face expressed his determination then, and Mr. Pike's trust in his own influence fell to zero.

"You did not wish little Carry to love her mother, then?" he asked.

"Not *first of all*! The mother has benighted my past sufficiently, without weaning away the affections of my daughter. "Carry, you will always love me best, and think of me with your best love," she told the child a day or two ago; and the child loves her already, and turns away from me. For ever an incessant cry for the mother's side, one mortifying appeal to get away from this house! I am jealous man—and I will not have it!"

"This is not like you, Neal. This is childish."

"I am becoming childish," was Neal's answer.

"And this is inconsiderate and—wrong."

"Still I have made up my mind, and there is nothing on earth to change it."

"In your place, I would have thought of the mother a little more," said Pike, "of a desolation deeper than your own, of a life that has made atonement for its one error, and will not trouble any one much longer—not even herself."

"What do you mean?" asked Neal.

"That she is a poor weak woman, whom a breath may injure—a woman who has suffered much, and should not meet a desperate affliction at the eleventh hour like this. Neal, she cannot live!"

"She was always a delicate woman in appearance," he answered, "and she will live, I hope and believe, many years yet."

"You hope?"

"Yes—I do not begrudge her one minute of her life—I would have her live to think more penitently of the past—to see her child a woman in the future, a woman that shall teach her by example in what life's duties honestly consist."

"Still thinking of the wrong!"

"I have not forgotten it—but, Pike, I have forgiven it."

"No."

"I have forgiven it," he reiterated, "with all my heart! I was not free from blame—I was more hard and stern than the facts warranted, and I leaped at conclusions which, thank God, were false enough. But I cannot forget her revenge, and whilst my child is very young—impressionable and weak, I will not have a reckless mother exert an influence unwittingly for evil."

"You have forgiven the past?" said Mr. Pike, once more, as though the asseveration were not to be believed.

"I have said so."

"Tell that unhappy woman so, Neal Galbraith," said Mr. Pike, with energy, "lest she die before you come back from this useless journey, and die believing in your want of charity."

"I have told her—I have shown it by my actions; I have let her even steal my daughter's love from me."

He came back to the old subject, as though it was a fresh indignity hurled against his pride.

"And envious of your child's love for the mother, you render daughter, mother, father—all unhappy!"

"For that daughter's sake—that daughter who will be more grateful when her years are older."

"I would not take the child away without seeing the mother," again remarked Mr. Pike; "I tell you that she has no faith in your forgiveness, and that it would fill her heart with joy at the last to hear you say so."

"No words of mine can give her joy ever again."

"They can, Neal."

"Take them to her then—you, the mediator!"

"Ah! they must be spoken by yourself."

"I shall never see her."

"Well—well," said Mr. Pike, with a sigh; "what shall I say to her? Think over your kindest and best words, and they shall be delivered to her. I had a hope—not a very intense one—that you and she might shake hands, and let one roof be over you again; but that dissipated—what shall I say to Mrs. Galbraith?"

Neal sat and thought. He had coloured at the mention of Mr. Pike's hope, and then his brow had contracted, and his face assumed its old repellent aspect, mingled with a look of anxiety that was new there.

"I scarcely understand this sudden interest in her," said Neal; "when did you see her last?"

"Yesterday."

"Did she mention me?—my unforgiveness?—her anxiety to feel assured, that I bore no malice in my heart against her?"

"Her brother did—not herself."

"Her brother has been a liar from his cradle."

"Neal, are you too proud to send kind words to a despairing woman?"

"She will think me very foolish," he murmured; "but if you wish it, be it so."

He thought again, then started up suddenly, and began to pace the room, speaking with great rapidity.

"Tell her that I am about to take our child away, thinking it better for little Carry to be carefully, religiously, and even strictly brought up. That I have no power to make my child all that is good, and that for that child's sake—only *her* sake—I take her away for awhile, sacrificing my happiness as well as the mother's. You need not pain her, Pike, by saying that I fear her influence over the daughter might do harm—that was between you and me, and uttered hastily. Tell her, too," he added, still more rapidly, "that she shall see that child in the holiday seasons—that I have not withdrawn my promise—that I can feel for her deprivation; but that once more for the child's sake, I assert that it is best. And add this—that if she think there is any forgiveness needed for that fatal step which took her from my home, and cast suspicions on her which the world will never take away, that forgiveness is freely granted. I see her life clearly from that day to this—her weakness, wilful pride, and misery—I pity and forgive it—I, who need forgiveness myself! Assure her that I might have been more generous, and she more patient, but that it was not destined to be otherwise, and in testing us too much, God set us irrevocably apart. Apart thus, I have been a colder, harder, and worse man, and that it is only

lately that I have learned my errors with her own. There, I have said enough, I think."

"Neal, you love this poor woman still?"

"No more. No talk of love to me, or of anything better and brighter than this day. I am resigned, I tell you. I have sobered down to working life, with you to thank for it. You will not vex me any more by this obtrusiveness."

"If you would only believe in your wife's fading life, and of the happiness that you might afford her at the last by speaking to her as you have done to me."

Neal turned fiercely upon him.

"*I will not go!*"

Mr. Pike accepted that answer as final, and went sorrowfully away; he had done his best, but he was scarcely satisfied with the result.

CHAPTER III.

A LAST EFFORT.

CARRY GALBRAITH made preparations to receive her visitor—preparations that were not made outwardly. Carry was weak, and found great difficulty in moving now; the doctor hemmed her in with a hundred cautions, and though she kept but fifty of them, still the restrictions wearied and perplexed her. Even in her latter days, she fretted against restraint, and confinement to the house all that dreary winter had not rendered her composed.

It was this effort at composure which formed the greater part of Carry's preparations; she could not think of Miss Merton with that charity she held, or thought that she held, to all the rest of the world, and yet there was even a longing to be at peace with *her*. Miss Merton had been the rival of her life; she had ever stood between her and her husband; she would marry that husband, and take away her dear child's love from her before her grave was green. But there would be in the future an immensity of power to make or mar the happiness of Neal and little Carry, and she would like to hear from the lips of the rival an assurance that that happiness would not be destroyed by any want of thought.

What Addie Merton desired of her was not to the purport, and did not trouble her. She might wish forgiveness herself, or desire to weary her with preachings common to her set, and common in themselves—but that did not matter. She had a vague desire that

good would follow from their interview, and she waited, not too patiently, for the advent of Miss Merton.

Carry had expected Addie the day following Mr. Pike's visit, but she came not. The next day the heavy slanting rain, fierce and incessant, seemed to give evidence of no intrusion till the morrow. Carry came down late that day, more weak than she had been all the winter through, and took her place in the capacious, deeply-pillowed chair.

"I'm glad that we shall be alone to-day," she said to her mother; "I don't know that I feel strong enough for visitors."

"Lor bless the child, you're strong enough," said Mrs. Webber; "it's only the weather, and the worry. You've had a deal to try you, and now it's telling on you, but the wust is over."

"Yes—I think it is."

"And as for you getting weaker and weaker, why, it's nonsense. Do you think it at all likely, Carry, than an old woman like me is to be left alone in the world, and you, young still, to go afore me? Why, it aint nat'ral."

"I don't think that you should look upon my going in that light," said Carry; "you should be glad."

"Glad!—why, *you* haven't been a torment to me for no end of years."

"Glad that I shall be free from all the troubles of a life made dark by my own willfulness. Free from the misconceptions of those who might think more charitably of me, now the hour is so late."

"Before I'd think anything more of *him*, I'd be shot;" cried Mrs. Webber.

Carry closed her eyes, to shut out, as it were, her mother's asperities, and they were silent for some time—until the visitor whom they had not expected that afternoon announced her presence at that house.

"You will leave us, mother; it is necessary that I should speak to Miss Merton alone."

"If I can't be trusted, to be sure I will," and Mrs. Webber departed, after muttering this remonstrance.

In a few minutes the two young women were face to face again; theirs had been ever strange meetings, marred by much want of sympathy, and this was the strangest of them all.

"I did not expect you on so inauspicious a day," said Carry; "but you are welcome."

"I am glad to hear you say that."

"Nay, you are very welcome," she added; "for I have a great deal on my mind, and this may be the only chance of relating it to you. Miss Merton, we have never been good friends—there was a something in me, or something in you, that kept us ever apart—an instinctive enmity."

"No enmity on my side, Mrs. Galbraith."

"Ah! you will not confess it. But there *was*—there must have been."

"Why?"

"My husband was turning against me, and learning to love you. You know that now."

"Madam! I have never known it;—it was not to be known;—it was an idea conceived only by a jealous woman."

Addie had forgotten her mission, in her indignation. They were ever to exchange angry words, these rival heroines of ours.

"If I have been deceived all my life;" murmured Carry; "if I could believe it."

"You will acquit me of so vile a thought, Mrs. Galbraith?"

"Is there any telling where love begins?—at what epoch in our lives it first steals into the heart, a curse or blessing, as God decrees? There must have been on his part—there might have been on yours—some hopes akin to those which were in existence a little while ago."

"Mrs. Galbraith, it is this estimate of others that has worked harm to you."

"I will try and think better of you all," said Carry, very wearily; "I have never been a shrewd woman—I may be wrong, and I care not to continue the subject. But," added she, with a suddenness that was startling, "you love him now."

Addie changed colour, and was silent.

"I am not wrong, Miss Merton?"

"I love him as a brother very dear to me," she said, at last. "I had learned to love him with my whole heart, believing that his happiness lay with me alone, and that to my hands would fall the task of cheering him. Mrs. Galbraith, as a sister—say even more than a sister—I shall always be to him now, but I shall never marry him."

"No, no—you must not say that!" cried Carry.

"Mrs. Galbraith!" exclaimed Addie.

Carry was herself again—wild, earnest, and impassionate.

"I say that you must not tell me this," Carry said; "that power to cheer Neal's future will remain to you when I am gone, and you must do your best. He is young, and the life before him must not be wholly desolate. By-and-by, he will come to you again, and remind you of a past engagement, and you must not stand back in your pride, or cast him down with it. Miss Merton, you must be his wife."

"Never, Mrs. Galbraith."

"I think that you will," said Carry, urgently. "I want you to sit here with me, and think of it also. If I were to die, believing that to his side there would steal never a comforter again, and that you, a good wife, would not make reparation for me, a bad one, I should die very, very sorrowful."

Addie sat amazed at this entreaty—at this variable nature, turning to her, of all women in the world.

"Mrs. Galbraith, I beg that you will say no more."

"I beg that you will hear me," entreated Carry. "I was hasty and unjust a few minutes since. I have been until now, mistaken in you—blinded by my evil passions, I have taken false ideas for true convictions, until they have wrecked me thus. But I loved my husband always, and standing erect in his pride, and his defiance of me, I still love him. Oh! Miss Merton, my wounded self-love ruined my life—it may yours."

"Mrs. Galbraith, will you let me speak to you for a short while?—will you sit calmly by my side and let me tell you the object of my mission here?"

"If you will withdraw one rash assertion."

"I will say nothing of the future—I will retract all that I have said concerning that which remains in God's hands—but I will make no promises."

"You are hard with me."

"No—I hope not."

Carry repeated her assertion—she who would have repelled the rival, had she professed her love for Neal at an earlier stage of this meeting. To the last, a woman strange and inconsistent. She sat with her hands clasped, looking at the fire, trembling with her recent excitement, harassed by the thoughts of what would happen in the long afterwards, when Neal was free, and this young woman had turned away from him. Addie had drawn nearer to Carry in her interest; the subject on which she was anxious to dwell was approaching, and needed tact and earnestness. It had seemed an easy task till yesterday—but now the chances were against her. Neal was even against her also. She even felt a secret indignation against Neal's last step, Neal's last instance of his inflexibility, that had rendered her the bearer of ill news, when she would have brought only peace.

"I wish to speak of Neal, as *your* husband, Mrs. Galbraith. You will bear with me?"

"A strange subject!—well?"

"In your heart, may I ask, is there not rankling a sense of injury?—a belief that had he acted more kindly, more generously, in the past, so sad a life for man and wife need not have occurred?"

"I have outlived that belief. I make no excuses for myself now—my act, Miss Merton, was unpardonable."

"He has not outlived that thought, however, and it renders him a better man."

"He?—Neal?"

Carry pressed her hands together, and looked eagerly at the speaker.

"He take a share of the blame? Oh! no, you are mistaken," she murmured.

"Assure her that I might have been more generous ! ' were his words to my uncle yesterday."

"God bless him!" ejaculated Carry; "he sees that I was weak, not sinful. Miss Merton, you make me happy indeed."

She pressed Addie's hand in hers, but Addie felt like a criminal. She would have reserved these good tidings to the last, to sweeten a bitter fact approaching, but it was necessary that Carry should think the best of Neal, lest the man's last and most cruel resolution should strike her wholly down.

"What made him think of me, or talk of me?" Carry said, eagerly; "he and your uncle speaking together of the wife again? For what reason?"

"You thought that Neal had not forgiven the past."

"He judges me better in it, but he has not forgiven me."

"He has. He said——"

"Oh! I can have no forgiveness at second hand," said the wife, proudly. "When he and I are face to face, and he can say that with his heart, then I will believe him. Was there forgiveness in his manner to me when we met in this house? No—only the icy coldness that the wrong has set between us like a wall."

"I have a message from him—especially for you, communicated to my uncle yesterday."

"A message to be sent to me—from him?"

"Yes."

"Why this sudden thought of me? Miss Merton, there is something more to tell."

"A little. He is about to go upon a long journey with his child."

To Addie's surprise, the revelation had not that bewildering, prostrating effect on Carry which might have been anticipated. The face paled wondrously, but the firmness of the wife remained with her.

"When?" asked Carry.

"At twelve to-night."

"And he knows that I am dying, and would leave with me words of peace—not bring them with him, as one truly generous might have done. Firm to the very last."

She had said a moment since that she would have no forgiveness at second hand; but the wish to know all was too intense, and Carry was more womanly in her weakness.

"What message sends he?" she asked eagerly.

Addie Merton told her. She had well learned the lesson of her uncle, and her uncle had not forgotten a word of Neal's last message. It fell upon greedy ears, and a thirsty heart; it came in time to cheer this stricken woman, who tried to keep the tears down—a vain effort in that hour when a long restraint was weakened by the earnestness of her companion.

When Addie had concluded, Carry said :

"I would be glad to hear those words again—to take them to my heart, and learn my lesson from them. Am I tiring you?"

"No."

Addie Merton repeated the long message—spoke once more of the child's departure, and Neal's reason for it—of his wish to forget the past, and sink the errors in it with his free forgiveness—of that share of the blame which he took upon himself, and which had tracked his steps, a black remorse despite all his sense of injury.

It was strange—very strange—that the threatened withdrawal of her child should affect Carry so little, compared with the knowledge of Neal Galbraith's better thoughts of her—a knowledge that altered much that world-weary face.

"And your uncle, knowing Neal so well, believes him?"

"Yes."

"That it is forgiveness—free, generous, and without a drawback but his presence here! Oh! is it possible?"

"It is the truth."

"I shall think so presently. I was not deserving wholly of forgiveness, although I went away heart-broken, believing in the last words he uttered, that he would be more content in life without me. Do you think—do you really think, now—that he meant those words?"

"He did not, Carry, I am sure."

"They drove me from home—they kept me ever away from it, even in the early days, when, with my pride abased, I crept back to his door, and waited there, and then stole off again—stole off in search of my brother, when I found my own living impossible to earn. He did not speak anything about that—that awful night?"

"No."

"He will take the child away—and before he and she come back again, I shall be dead. It is hard never to see them both again—if I were to go to him now—he would forgive me!"

"I would ask you to be patient, Mrs. Galbraith, and to wait. Neal *is* troubled still, and his first impulse is not always the best or kindest."

"You—you have not told him how near to the grave I am?"

"God only knows that!"

"Oh! you will not believe it either of you. If he knew that there was no hope, he would see me—assure me with his own lips of that forgiveness which you have brought to me. He was not always cold and hard like this—and he loved me very much once. My God! how he loved me in the early days!"

"Patience!" Addie murmured.

But her voice was broken itself, and the wife's trouble was hers.

"Had I come yesterday, I would have advised you to seek Neal out," said Addie; "it has been a hope of mine that he and you should meet again—that one home should shelter both of you."

Carry put her hand to her heart and moaned with pain at this—the pain of such a thought after all that had passed.

“When he thought that you were drowned at sea, Carry, he used to tell me sometimes of his love for you, how deep and true it was, even in the first hour of his anger. I remembered all this when you came back to life, and I built a hope upon it, and worked patiently towards it until yesterday.”

“And then?”

“Then my uncle sought to tell Neal of the hope that he had with me, and—Neal was going away.”

“And took no consolation from your efforts—well, that was not likely. Miss Merton, forgive me if I have judged you uncharitably—you, my comforter, my husband’s friend, the kind nurse whom my child loves. I see your truth, and my poor, wilful self, very plainly now.”

“I have nothing to forgive,” said Addie; “and you have nothing to thank me for, Mrs. Galbraith. You must remember, but not uncharitably, that I was acting for your husband’s sake.”

“Act for him in the future—and I will thank you in my grave,” said Carry, with her old vehemence; “stand away from him, and I will haunt you.”

“I will believe in your better days and greater strength, Carry—you so young still.”

“I am weaker than any one believes,” said Carry, in a whisper; “to spare them all I have been very quiet. But the sand runs through the glass so rapidly, that I could name the day when a poor, lonely woman, aged and weak, will draw down the blinds in this house.”

“I hope not—I pray not.”

“I shall die peacefully now—tell Neal so—ask your uncle to tell him.”

She spoke no more of the past or future, and Addie shortly afterwards, with many words meant to be assuring—words that breathed of a world wherein there were no faults, and all was harmony—went from that home once more, this time rejoicing in that success which rewards at times honest and unselfish labour.

Meanwhile Carry was left to think of the news that had been brought her—to dwell upon it word by word—to detail it to the flinty old woman who resumed her place by that winter’s fire, and who saw nothing in it “to make a fuss about.”

“If I could only see him, mother—just once more.”

“Stuff, Carry—he don’t care for coming here, and we can live without him. He’s like a bit of brick.”

“I don’t think that I can die without I see him!” cried Carry, looking up with flushed cheeks and heaving bosom; “I—I think I ought to thank him.”

“Much he’d care for that.”

"Why, he may fancy that I am ungrateful!—I have been always defiant in my manner to him, facing him with a resistance that has only hardened him, when an appeal for pardon might have altered everything. And he goes away to-night."

"Then you can't see him; that's as positive as most things."

Carry sighed and resumed her thoughtful looks again, but the red flush on her cheeks died not out with her past animation. Presently the early night came on, the rain dashed against the glass, and the wind soughed dismally, as though burdened with painful thoughts like hers.

"I think it's getting late," said Mrs. Webber, waking from a doze and rubbing her eyes with her knuckles.

"No—it is early."

"What time's that striking?"

"Nine."

"Not more than that—eh?"

Mrs. Webber dozed off again, and when her chin was reposing on her chest, and her ten fingers spread out towards the fire in a disjointed fashion, the daughter rose silently and swiftly, and crossed the room towards the door, whereat she stood looking back at the sleeper.

The door opened noiselessly, and still the second slumber of the mother undisturbed; an instant or two afterwards, the maid-servant was scared from dreams of her own at the kitchen fire, by the young mistress, standing heavily shawled before her.

"Don't scream—don't look so frightened. I am going out."

"My gracious, Mrs. Galbraith—on such a night as this."

"Yes, it is very important, and I must go. Don't tell my mother; she may sleep soundly up stairs until I return again—she may never know that I have been away, if you are careful. Come and shut the door softly behind me."

"Oh! dear, dear, dear! Don't go, Mum—and you so delicate!"

"Hush!—you are noisy, and should have more self-possession at a time like this."

"Let me run for a cab."

"I will get one at the corner of the street—I am not going far."

"Oh! dear, dear, dear!" murmured the maid again, following her mistress up stairs and along the passage to the outer door, which, being opened, let in a rush of wind and rain.

"Oh! look at the night now!"

"Will you be silent?" cried Carry, turning upon her fiercely; "this is a happy night for me. Keep your peace till I return."

She went out into the rain storm and away, walking with a rapidity that was very new to her in those days, and yet which she did not remark or seem to suffer from. She heeded nothing in her eagerness, not the pitiless down-pour of the rain, or the wind that shook her with its force at every desolate street corner. The place

was very dark and very empty of all human life ; when she was in the Brixton road, no sign of a cab was visible, and the rain hissed at her like a thousand serpents. She hurried on, beset by one thought so near unto a hope that it gave lightness and vigour to her steps, and deadened all consciousness of danger.

A cab jolting along the road towards Kennington, with the driver heaped upon the box, butting his head against the rain. Carry called to him, and he seemed to hesitate, and then passed on. Carry was hurrying on again, when he drove back towards her.

"How far are you going?" he asked.

"To Streatham—only a little way," she pleaded ; "drive fast, and name your own price."

"You're uncommon good, Mum. That's an order we don't often get in our line."

He expected her to smile at this remark, but the white face did not light up at his pleasantry. He mounted the box, and proceeded to anathematise and flog the horse into rapid action. Carry was borne along at a good pace, the cab swaying to and fro, coming with a crash at last against the wheels of another cab rattling down the hill, a collision from which no damage ensued, and only brought things to a stand-still for a moment, engendering the most unseemly personalities between the drivers.

"Don't stop, please—I am pressed for time," cried Carry, lowering the window, "this is life and death."

"All right, Mum—come up, you brute."

The horse stumbling and dashing up the hill towards Streatham—finally before the house of Neal Galbraith, merchant. Carry sprang out, crying—

"Wait for me—I am going back!" and then struggled with the iron gate, and with herself, not strong and light of foot now, but growing very weak and faint.

The gate open, and Carry toiling slowly along the pavement, on which the lamp above the door was gleaming. At the door, knocking timidly and praying very earnestly for strength—a little more strength—until she was face to face with Neal.

The door open, and the traveller in her wet garments entering the hall, clinging almost to the wall, and scaring the strange woman who had admitted her.

"Mr.—Mr.—Gal—braith!"

Another door opening on the left, and one welcome face shining as it were from cloud-land—the honest, wondering face of Mrs. Higgs.

"Save us!—Carry!—you!"

"Neal!—where is he?—I must see him!"

"Go—gone away!"

"GONE!"

It was a wild hopeless cry—a wail over the last hope that had died there—and then Carry fell forwards on the pavement of the hall!

CHAPTER IV.

CARRY MAKES HER LAST CONFESSION.

CARRY GALBRAITH came slowly back unto herself—wondering for an instant at the new world in which she was, and which loomed at her through the mists; then the truth came back with her, and brought a semblance of strength.

The room was well furnished and well-lighted, but very misty still. It was some time before she could make out the figures in that room—who was the old white-haired man sitting near the fire, but looking anxiously towards her?—who the woman that held her hand and called her Carry, and asked if she remembered her?—who the taller, darker figure standing at a little distance, grave as destiny itself?

She sat up, pushed her hair back from her eyes, and made some hasty movement with her hands as though to dispel the mist before her, which rendered everything so vague and indistinct.

“Who is that standing there—there facing me?”

“It is your husband, Neal,” said the woman’s voice, “and I am Aunt Higgs. There, you’ll be better now.”

“Neal,” she said to him with her arms towards him almost appealingly, “they told me that you had gone away.”

“I saw you in the cab which ran against my own,” was the deep, not unmoved answer; “I have come back—what is it that you want with me?”

“I am glad that you are here,” she said, letting her hands fall to her side despairingly; “I have been very anxious to see you once again!”

Neal was silent. He stood looking on the ground, with a stern and yet a troubled face. Her presence there was still a mystery to him; still unwelcome there, Carry thought with a sinking heart.

“I am going away again in a minute—going away for good,” she hastened to say, lest her presence there should be misunderstood, “but I heard that you were about to travel with our little girl—where is she?” she added, looking wildly round.

“In her own room,” said Aunt Higgs; “we didn’t want to scare the child too much.”

“—With its mother,” added Carry, quickly; “that was right enough. I have scared too many already here. I think that I will—go now.”

She had seen no sympathy in him—no change on that face which had never, since their separation, smiled at her; Miss Merton had exaggerated some commonplace words that he had used, and all was

the same as before—not worse, not better! She half rose from the sofa on which she had been placed, and then sank back again. Patience, her strength had not come back—she must wait awhile.

“Will you tell me what has brought you here, Mrs. Galbraith?” asked her husband; “I wish—I am anxious—to know.”

“You sent me to-day, or I was told that you had sent me, a forgiveness for all the past—was that true?”

“True enough.”

“Not a few words from the lip, wrung from you by the exhortation of a good man, but a forgiveness from the heart, Sir?”

“From the heart—yes.”

“I could not believe it utterly—and I came to make quite sure before you went away. I knew that I should die content if I could hear you tell me that great truth, and I wished—so much, Neal!—to see you just once more!”

Neal looked down intently at the carpet—his head bowed more and more, until his face was hidden from her.

“You must not mind me intruding on your house, set away from it, as from your love and trust in me—I will go away directly! But, Neal, as we shall never meet again on earth—as I am a woman repentant of all the misery that I have caused—confessing here my great mistake, and sorrowing and suffering for it still, let me hear *you* speak of that forgiveness.”

Neal looked up quickly, and motioned towards Mrs. Higgs, who moved across the room, took her old master by the arm, and led him away, leaving man and wife together. It was a strange pride of Neal's at the last, that removed all witnesses to his better feelings, his truer manhood.

He came rapidly towards her as the door closed on them, and then paused again, with his hands clenched, and his teeth set, almost as though he had repented of his charity.

“Neal—you are not sorry for those words you sent me?” she cried.

“No—forgiven, Carry, with all my heart and soul! Forgiven for that step which took you from me, when that heart was fondest!”

“When all chances of happiness had not met their death by my mad haste!” she said. “Forgiven for the death track of years, followed by you and me—freely forgiven?”

“Freely!”

“Oh! Neal, this was worth coming for! I shan't mind dying now!”

She held her hands towards him again, and he took them in his own, and looked down upon her sadly.

“Why did you go away from me—you of all women—for a few bitter words, spoken in haste, and hastily recalled? Oh! Carry, what might have been!”

"You said that if you were rich—a rich man, with the means to set me from you—at a distance where my presence could save you from pain—you would do it; it would be better for you, and bring more peace. You spoke—oh! Neal, you spoke as if I alone were in the way of your whole life, and I—I could not bear it, but went away at your wish, crushed down by my despair of ever gladdening your home. You seemed to prefer the whole world to me—and waking to that knowledge, I stole away to my own misery."

"You were wrong—I was looking forward to a success in life that should have made all things better for us both. I was troubled in my struggle for it—and then came Tressider, and his letter to you. There, all has been explained long since, and I know all. We need speak no longer of the past—you and I, who have suffered much in it, and have been both to blame."

"Not you, Neal. I take all that blame myself, and am happy now in your forgiveness of it. I will go now," she said, withdrawing her hands from his, and rising; "go back to my own home, strengthened, chastened by this confession, and at peace—with all. You will let me see my girl before I go?"

"Presently—presently."

"And, Neal, as I shall not see you any more, let me ask you sometimes to remember me. When you are married again—don't start, I wish that with all my heart, for your sake and little Carry's!—try and think of me, when your own happiness may be risked by a harsh word. No mystery—and no distrust on either side."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going home now—after seeing Carry for a moment."

"No—you will stay!" cried Neal; "you must not talk of dying now—or of other wives for me. There steals upon me one more chance of happiness, and it will not be dashed away. Carry, you must stay."

"*Here!*—stay here, Neal?—and with *you*?"

"If you will. If you can trust your life with me, after all the past that has sundered us. There can be no true forgiveness without it. Stay."

He held her in his arms, as though fearful that she would break away from him, and end this dream of better days; and Carry nestled to his heart there, and sobbed long and passionately.

"Oh! if I could live now," she said wildly. "I who do not wish to die, but to come back to life and you. Neal," looking up into his face with an intentness that awed him, "if the night was not so close upon the day, and all so nearly over."

"It may not be—with God's grace and mercy, Carry!"

"It is close upon the end," she murmured. "I am very weak—I am so glad that we have met like this! It wasn't right to regret God's will, Neal—but then I have always been discontented, and it

is like me to the last. Bear with me for a little while—my husband!”

* * * * *

Carry never went back to her mother's home. The new life began, and the old life died out together, and with them both, Carry gave up all struggling.

At peace with her husband, with her stormy self, with the world narrowing before her gaze, and the broader, brighter world stretching out beyond, there was no cause for struggling. Nothing to grieve for at the last, when the fretfulness at God's will—common to our poor humanity—had passed away, and she could feel that it was happiness to lie thus loved by every one about her; and greater happiness to think of coming rest from all petty troubles and all past misconceptions of life's duties.

To lie there, very weak, but very calm and still—forgiven all past trespasses on earth, and with faith to believe in their redemption in heaven. To know that she should pass away from that sick couch in a little while, and that no one would rejoice at it, but sorrow for her as for one dearly loved!

Neal kept his place by that bed, which she never left again—to which she had been led on that night of reconciliation, and lay down content to die there. Day and night, for the little while left them both to be together, Neal sat and watched and prayed—not content himself, but trying to learn his lesson from her resignation, and thinking of the follies and faults of his own life that had not sought to end disunion at an earlier period. Looking at her, so young still, still so beautiful, could he believe in the years that had intervened since they had spoken last of their love for one another? Could he, with her hand in his, and her full, wistful eyes bent on him—as though doubting his forgiveness even yet!—believe theirs had been such bitter quarrelling? A smile or two, a few fair words, an honourable self-restraint, a still more honourable frankness, and all the errors, miscalculations, wrongs of two young lives, might have been swept away into the outer darkness. But they had closed their eyes upon the light, and passed into the nether land—and here the moral in the dying woman—and in the life disappointed, that was shadowed forth in that hour.

But not *in* her, to whom the memory of past trials brought no pain—who looked back with a regret that was for Neal's sake—not for hers then.

The mother was in the house, waiting and watching with Mrs. Higgs for the last—seeing Carry now and then, and scarce believing yet that her daughter would really die and leave her entirely alone. Joe and his wife came softly into the room once a day to speak to Carry, to talk with assumed cheerfulness of matters very foreign to the sick woman's thoughts, and then to go down stairs with faces

full of gloom. Mr. Pike and Addie had seen her, and bidden her good-bye; to both she had whispered something, and from both she had extorted a promise, and they were gone, too—only her child and Neal were left her now; they were to be all in all to her till the time for their parting stole upon them.

"Neal," she said, one day to him, "you are not building rashly—almost wickedly—on my return to health and strength?"

"No—not now," he murmured.

"You are resigned?"

"God will bring me resignation in His own good time!"

"Why, we should never have been at peace—and it is so merciful of Him to end the story thus, parting us so happily! Think, Neal, of my old nature coming back with my new strength, and you and I beginning afresh our troubles!"

"Never again would there have been anything but peace between us, Carry."

"Ah! it is easy to say that, in an hour like this," said Carry; "but I have always been strange and wilful, and it was never ordered that happiness should follow my steps. So much the better for you and me to say good-bye."

"No—no!"

"In the time left you, I see your better life, Neal," she said, laying her hand upon the dark hair of her husband; "you are very young still, and will have new thoughts, new pursuits, new duties. You will marry Addie Merton some day."

"I will walk through life alone—I am for ever——"

"Neal," she said very quickly, "for your own sake, no rash promises. I see the future for my husband, and it is a happy one, with a woman who is patient, earnest, self-denying, and God-fearing—who will love my husband very dearly, and be a good mother to my child, making all things light. This picture will come true—I see it in the distance very bright, and it renders me content to part with you."

"Don't speak again," moaned Neal.

He could not see the brightness then—he faced his dying wife, and felt but the agony of their coming separation—of marriages and giving in marriage he could not dwell upon. But in the future he remembered Carry's prophecy, and saw how true it was. Years afterwards he was happy, but not till years had passed, and Carry's was a gentle, peaceful memory, did he, remembering her wish, and thinking of that past which has formed a subject for this story-book, take unto himself a wife all-fitting for him.

But to sit by Carry's bedside and talk of a new wife was a mockery at which his heart recoiled in that hour; he was very sorrowful, and the loneliness of life was coming back to him again, although he had promised resignation.

"Later in the week, he came face to face with the worst—or

the best, for it was directed by the Wise Hand. Sitting at her bedside in the greyness of a wintry afternoon, he thinking, and she lying there so still, her voice—as if far away from him already—whispered his name softly.

“Carry, you spoke to me,” he said, bending over her.

“Yes, dear—I *am* going!”

“No—no—not like this—not without a word to me.”

“Call—Carry—and—the rest.”

They were in the room, all those whom she loved, and with whom she had made her peace; they came in with that stealthy tread, that reverence for the mystery of death and life to come, which makes rooms akin to these places of sacred farewell to the dear ones going their long journey.

“I thought—that you would like to say good-bye—to me,” she whispered—“and Carry—won’t be frightened at her—mother!”

“Oh! my poor mamma!”

“Hush! dear—your mamma is happy now with you—and *him*!”

She strove to reach her hand out to her husband, but life’s last impulse was not strong enough. Neal, who detected the movement, leaned forward, and clasped her hand in both of his.

“This—is—forgiveness, I’m sure!” she murmured.

The hand that lay in Neal’s turned very cold, but the arm that pressed the child to her had power in it yet. Neal bent over her and kissed her long and tenderly. A little quivering of the lips—a closing of the eyes—and then life, and all life’s mistakes, were at an end for ever!

THE END.

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